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SIR ROBERT SHIRLEY, BART.

BY

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"LADY FLAVIA," "LORD LYNN'S WIFE," "THE TENTH EARL,"
&c., &c.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

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SIR ROBERT SHIRLEY, BART.

CHAPTER I.

A PROPOSAL IN FORM.

SIR ROBERT SHIRLEY had one advantage over some others of his compeers. Whatever part he desired to play, he knew the attire that would befit the occasion, and could, at any rate, dress according to the character. On the morning of the same day that witnessed the interview between Glitka Eberganyi and the two Daneborough officials, the master of Shirley drove

from his house at Helston to Woodburn Parsonage. He drove his mail phaeton, with the silver-mounted harness, and the two splendid bright bays, with black points, and faultless manes, and tempers as free from fault, matched to a quarter of an inch, and as perfect as carriage-horses can be. The very servant behind him was a model groom. As for the baronet himself, he wore a frock-coat, exactly buttoned, and his gloves, and his boots, and his hat were just what gloves, and boots, and a hat ought to be.

‘Master be going a-courting!’ was the verdict of the servants’ hall.

‘Not he,’ sardonically rejoined the testy under-butler, who repined at his exile from London. ‘If he’d been bent on spooning, he’d have had a flower in his button-hole, wouldn’t he? You girls cotton to a chap

with a rosebud stuck in his coat. But Sir Robert has got none, and, besides, he looks as serious as if he were going to be hanged, or, anyhow, judged. Most likely he wants to coax a loan out of an attorney.'

Sir Robert drove across to Woodburn, and to the parsonage, the bright bays keeping step admirably well, and their owner pondering in his mind, as with his whip he lightly touched their silken manes, on what they would fetch at an auction or how much he could get for them in dealing with a friend.

He reined up the high-stepping bays in front of the ivy-covered parsonage, and, sending in his card, accompanied the scrap of pasteboard by a request that he might see, not Mr. Langton, but Mr. Marsh from London, if that gentleman would

kindly accord him ten minutes for a brief conversation.

This message sent in, Sir Robert sat quite still and impassive, with the reins in his well-gloved hand. He had often been at the parsonage before, as we know, and was no stranger there, but on this occasion he did not choose to presume upon his former acquaintance, and almost intimacy, with Mr. and Mrs. Langton, but remained without, in his carriage, waiting for a reply. That the rector and his wife were surprised is not wonderful. In houses of the calibre of Woodburn Parsonage, members of the family sometimes permit themselves the pardonable indiscretion of peeping from windows when hoofs and wheels are heard without, and, no doubt, it was known that Sir Robert Shirley was outside, with his best horses, and dressed with

unusual care, and grave of aspect. Then, too, he would not come in, but in ceremonious style craved an interview with Mr. Marsh.

‘At all events, the visit, sir, is to you,’ said the rector, genially. ‘Perhaps you would like to see him in my study?’

No arrangement could have been better. Mr. Marsh stepped into the clergyman’s cosy book-room, with its well-stored shelves and littered tables, and into the study Sir Robert Shirley was promptly shown. The master of Shirley was urbane, and almost deferential, in the tone which he had chosen to adopt.

‘Mr. Marsh,’ he said, blandly, as soon as he had accepted the chair that was offered to him, ‘you will be surprised, I fear, at my calling upon you without the honour of an introduction; nor is it pro-

bable that I am known to you, even by report. But I was informed that Miss Mowbray's guardian, whose name is familiar to me through my intercourse with our kind friends at the parsonage here, was on a visit to Mr. and Mrs. Langton. And it is because you are Miss Mowbray's guardian that I have ventured to trouble you to-day.'

Mr. Marsh made a sort of bow, and grunted assent, pricking up his ears the while. He had not, as yet, divined the nature of the baronet's possible business with him.

'The fact is, sir,' said Sir Robert, with a frank smile, 'that—though it costs me something to make the avowal to a gentleman, who, unfortunately, is a total stranger to me—I am in love with Miss Violet Mowbray, your beautiful young ward, and

I have considered that the most straightforward course of proceeding was to go direct to the guardian, who, in her case, represents the authority of a parent, and tell him so, leaving him to decide, as to the eligibility of my proposals, as his sense of duty and his knowledge of the world shall dictate. I am aware,' ingenuously added the master of Shirley, 'that the course I have thought it right to adopt is an old-fashioned one, and perhaps unusual in these days; but I hope, dear sir, that you will forgive me if my honest wish to deal fairly by Miss Mowbray has led me to deviate from modern practice.'

Mr. Marsh nodded approval, and gave his grey hair a rub upwards. He thought the better of Sir Robert for his regard for antique fashions, especially when it was a question of a point so delicate as this.

The working partner in the firm of Crump, Marsh, and Caxton, confirmed old bachelor though he was, had yet a lofty idea of courtship and matrimony, and had all his life cherished the ancient theory that an offer of marriage should be preceded by a formal application to parents for permission to be a suitor. This wholesome rule is a little out of date in a hasty and irreverent age like ours, but there seemed to be something chivalrous, something Grandisonian, so to speak, in the baronet's conduct. And then he *was* a baronet, and the name of Shirley sounded well.

‘You have taken me somewhat by surprise,’ said Mr. Marsh, hesitatingly. ‘Nothing, you see, Sir Robert, had prepared me for this application, or for the notion that you had formed a deep attach-

ment to my ward. Miss Mowbray is still very young.'

'She is, indeed,' rejoined the baronet, earnestly, but almost humbly. 'But would she not be happier, sir, with an assured position, and under a husband's care, than fatherless and motherless in such a world as that which we see around us? But perhaps you may consider me as too old for Miss Mowbray? There is a disparity of age, as I am aware.'

'No, no, by no means!' exclaimed Mr. Marsh, as the image of Don in his youthful beauty rose up before his mental vision; 'I think a husband should be older than his wife. There would be no objection on that score.'

'And, I hope, not on any other,' chimed

in the baronet, fervently. 'There has been a long friendship, Mr. Marsh, between Mr. Langton, your nephew here, and my late father, and I was glad to renew the acquaintance some weeks ago, before I knew that Miss Mowbray, whom I have since learned to love, was an inmate of the parsonage. I know, and am glad to know, that Miss Mowbray has no fortune.'

As Sir Robert said this, the London merchant could not repress a chuckle, while he rubbed his hair vehemently in an upward direction. The baronet for a moment eyed him with surprise, and then went on, as smoothly as before,

'When I say no fortune, I merely speak in the common acceptance of the term. I am myself, as Mr. Langton is aware, a large landowner, so that the three or four

hundred pounds a year, which, I believe, belong to the young lady, can scarcely present any temptation to me. Let it, by all means, be strictly tied up, for her separate use. Quite independently of that small income, I could make a handsome settlement upon my wife, if only I could hope to hail your ward as Lady Shirley.'

Again Mr. Marsh chuckled at his own thoughts, and that audibly, although he blushed at his own apparent rudeness. He had been drawing a comparison between the disinterested character of this titled and estated gentleman, and the shameful conduct of him whom he was in the habit of branding as that miserable fortune-hunter, Don.

'I beg your pardon, I am sure,' said Mr. Marsh, somewhat confusedly; 'but

your sentiments, Sir Robert, do you much honour, and I esteem them at their worth, I can assure you.'

Sir Robert flinched a little. He looked in uneasy alarm at the drysalter. Could it be possible that Mr. Marsh's praise was ironical—that Mr. Marsh, instead of being his dupe, was an astute observer, who read the baronet's character aright, and saw what lurked beneath the fair-seeming mask? No, it was not possible. Violet's guardian was neither an eccentric humourist, nor a man of preternatural sagacity and knowledge of the world. He was sensible enough, perhaps, in his own groove of business life, but he had no Ithuriel spear to use as an unerring test of perfidy. Wherefore Sir Robert felt at ease again.

'You have taken a load from my heart,

Mr. Marsh,' said the baronet, quite as if he meant it. 'With you on my side, I shall feel almost confident of winning the fair prize I long for. Hitherto, I may own to you, I have been doubtful as to the view that you might entertain of my pretensions.'

'Your pretensions, Sir Robert, are well-founded, I am sure,' Mr. Marsh responded, graciously. 'I am, as you perhaps know, a quiet City man, leading a life very unfashionable, but I can quite realise the truth that men of rank and fortune—men like you, Sir Robert—are apt to look for money, as well as pedigree, or instead of pedigree, with their wives. And I can appreciate your conduct, indeed I can, as well as if my own experiences had been as modern as your own. May I ask if

you have ever spoken, on this topic, I mean, to my ward?’

‘I have spoken,’ answered the baronet, with an ingenuous sort of embarrassment, which won him the immediate sympathy of Mr. Marsh, himself a shy man, and therefore alive to all the sufferings to which bashful humanity is heir. ‘I have spoken, not in direct terms, but in language which many young ladies would have comprehended, if not approved. But Miss Mowbray’s timidity and candour, the dearest of her charms in my eyes, seem to hedge her in, like a crystal wall, alike from compliment and from a half-avowal of affection. And it was only in an unguarded moment that I ventured to express the admiration which I have never ceased to feel. Had Miss Mowbray had a father—but, as it is, I come to you,

sir, as her guardian, and you will send me from hence a happy and a hopeful man, if I can only feel sure that you consider favourably my suit.'

'Certainly, I'll speak to Violet, and that without delay,' said Mr. Marsh, encouragingly. 'That much, to further your purpose, Sir Robert, I can do. Of course the girl must choose for herself. Girls always do, now-a-days. But advice, if not authority, may still count for something in shaping and moulding the decisions of the fair sex. And, Sir Robert, my best wishes are for your success.'

When Sir Robert Shirley had driven off, his well-stepping bays and silver-mounted harness producing quite a sensation in the village street, Mr. Marsh remained vacantly gazing out of the window of the clergyman's study, but taking

no cognisance of the plants and flowers without, of the smooth-shaven lawn, or of the gravel dented by fresh hoof-prints and furrowed by recent wheels.

‘That will do!’ muttered Mr. Marsh, with an air of satisfaction. ‘Yes, that will do. Sir Robert Shirley would be just the husband for that delicate, shrinking little snowdrop of a girl. I’ll do my best.’

CHAPTER II.

‘I WILL ONLY MARRY DON.’

GUARDIANS, as compared with the parents with whom they are associated in popular phraseology, have a hard time of it. Of course, if a guardian is content to be a mere wooden figure-head, so to speak, keeping strictly to the letter of his legal duties, he may get through his term of office with the minimum of trouble to himself. He has but to refuse to act in all matters directly or indirectly relating to money, without the advice of

competent solicitors, with counsel's opinion in all difficult cases, and he is as safe as a sea-captain whose big ocean-going clipper-ship is formally delivered over to the conduct of a steam-tug and the charge of a Trinity-House pilot. But a custodian of more flesh-and-blood character will find his position no sinecure. Awkward events will occur; unexpected contingencies have to be faced. Miss Fanny engages herself to some dear, delightful scamp of a cavalry officer, who looks to her inheritance to pay his gambling debts. Or Young Hopeful *will* marry some rustic and penniless damsel down in the shires, who is an estimable young person, but hardly adapted by manners or education to preside over an aristocratic dinner-table. In both such instances the poor guardian, moved by no paternal instinct, and not

armed with the authority of a father, has the probability of an ineffectual struggle to confront, along with the certainty of being considered as a meddling tyrant.

Mr. Marsh was not of the stuff of which tyrants are made. He did think that modern manners, modern habits of thought, gave a latitude to the young which for various reasons was to be regretted. Especially as regarded the important business of matrimony was this the case. But he was aware, too, that to put back the hands of Time's great clock was a task as hopeless as to stem the tide, and that the youthful generation of to-day could not be managed in accordance with the maxims of yesterday. But still he was very anxious that Violet should not throw herself away upon a designing intriguer; and yet he was exceedingly desirous that Violet

should marry well. The designing intriguer, according to Mr. Marsh's prejudiced judgment, was Don. To marry well, it now appeared in Violet's case, would be to marry Sir Robert Shirley. Under ordinary circumstances, and considering Miss Mowbray's youth, there would have seemed to a prudent old bachelor like Ephraim Marsh no pressing necessity for the speedy marriage of his ward; but when a wolf, such as he deemed Don to be, prowls around the sheep-fold, care enough can scarcely be taken of the innocent lamb that is the object of his quest. As Lady Shirley, Violet would be safe.

Something of what was on his mind Mr. Marsh did say when he went back to the drawing-room, and found the rector deeply immersed in his newspaper, and Mrs.

Langton evidently excited and inquisitive. Marrying and giving in marriage are topics, be sure, that interested women above all other topics before the first brick of Babylon was baked, and still the subject keeps its freshness and its zest.

‘Sir Robert had a great deal to say to you, uncle,’ the clergyman’s wife remarked.

‘Sir Robert *had* a good deal to say,’ rejoined the drysalter, who was glad of the opportunity of speaking; ‘and you have been wondering, Charlotte, very likely, as to what could have been the subject of our late conversation, or why this gentleman should have preferred to inquire for a mere bird of passage and a stranger like myself. The fact is, he called on me simply in the capacity of Violet’s guardian.’

‘Dear me ! of Violet’s guardian !’ echoed Mrs. Langton, with the pseudo-surprise which even good women will sometimes affect when they want to hear more, while the rector laid his newspaper on his knee, and said, smiling,

‘A proposal, eh ? in the good old form, just as fortresses were once summoned to surrender with blast of trumpets and solemn embassy of heralds in their blazoned tabards riding to the barbican gate. Have I guessed rightly, sir ?’

‘You have guessed right,’ said Mr. Marsh.

‘Who would have thought it ? Poor, dear Violet !’ exclaimed Mrs. Langton. There was something of commiseration in her tone which irritated the nerves of the London merchant.

‘Upon my word, Niece Charlotte,’ he

said, quite snappishly, ‘one would think, to hear you, that the girl was going to be buried instead of married—that is, if she likes the man. I never could understand why you women persist in whimpering at a wedding, as though it were an execution, and why a bride, in all the finery that it has taken months of thought and weeks of trouble to concoct, should be wept over, as if the noose—— There, Charlotte, I didn’t mean to be rough—it’s only my way. Yes, Sir Robert has asked my consent to his offering his hand to my ward; and I was very greatly pleased by the straightforwardness, courteous, and, may say, chivalrous manner in which he did ask it.’

‘A thorough gentleman, and, I am sure, would make her happy,’ pronounced Mrs. Langton, whom the wily master of Shirley

had conciliated by a patient interest in her Cape heaths, Singapore orchids, and maidenhair ferns.

‘I think well of Sir Robert,’ said the rector, more slowly, ‘and it speaks well for him, too, that he seeks a bride almost dowerless, since, I feel assured, he knows nothing of this supposed hidden wealth of poor Violet’s. Rumour could scarcely have apprised him of such a thing, since both my wife and myself have been careful not to mention the matter.’

‘Not a syllable have I breathed as to Violet’s money, if there is any,’ said Mrs. Langton, positively.

‘And therefore,’ struck in Mr. Marsh, ‘I found more to admire in the behaviour of this man of rank and fashion, whose nature, as far as I could perceive, had remained unspoiled by the world. And I

have had some experience of reading men like a book.’

Poor, worthy Mr. Marsh forgot the narrow limits of his experience. He was a fair judge of a carman, and knew whether a clerk was worth his salary, but he had not the fathom-line by which to gauge the depths of fashionable and practised hypocrisy. Neither had, for that matter, the rector or his wife. There was a little more talk, and then Mrs. Langton, who was going upstairs to attire herself for some errand of mercy in the parish, promised to send Violet down to speak with her guardian, without apprising the dear girl of the subject of the coming conversation: the rector went back to his library, and Mr. Marsh paced, waiting, to and fro.

The reflections of the effective partner

in the long-established firm of Crump, Marsh, and Caxton, as he walked to and fro, awaiting the arrival of his ward, were of a very mixed character. He was getting a little tired of his sojourn in Yorkshire. It seemed to him as though he had made little or no progress in his search for Violet's hidden fortune. Superintendent Swann gave him no comfort. He was a tenacious, not to say an obstinate man, this London drysalter, and, having once accepted as an article of faith the fact that Miss Mowbray was entitled to a great sum of money, he held fast to it. But he wanted to be back in London—wanted, too, to be in a punt, far up the silvery Thames. August is the barbel-fisher's month, as it is that of his aristocratic fellow-sportsman, the grouse-shooter. And Mr. Marsh did long to be at Datchet, or Goring, or in the deep water

below Marlow Bridge, feeling the first tug at his heavily-leaded ledger-line of some piscine monster, capable, when hooked, of taking the punt in tow. But none the less was he determined to do his duty by the motherless girl.

Violet came into the drawing-room in some surprise. Mrs. Langton had kept her word, and had said nothing, but her manner had betrayed that the approaching interview was to be a momentous one.

‘My dear young lady,’ said Mr. Marsh, stopping in his walk so as to confront Violet, ‘I do hope that you will do me the justice to believe one thing, that in all that I may consider necessary to be said, and in all that I may find expedient to be done, I am guided simply and wholly by a sincere desire to see you happy.’

‘You were always very, very kind, dear

guardy,' said Violet, gently. She had been used, years ago, when she was a child, and less accustomed to her bereavement, to see more of the worthy London merchant than had lately been the case. He had been the one to teach her, at a teachable age, to address him as 'guardy,' precisely as the white-muslined heroines of old times accosted their brown-coated and square-toed guardians, in the bob-wigs and flowered waistcoats. She esteemed him, and was grateful to him, but not even for the sake of old kindness could she allow him to dictate to her where her heart was concerned. And, that her heart was no longer hers to give, we know.

'I had an interview, Violet, my dear,' said Mr. Marsh, clearing his throat and putting on his most impressive manner, 'with a gentleman who called here ex-

pressly to see me—an interview which, hackneyed man of the world as I am, has made me think the better of human nature.’

Perhaps Mr. Marsh was unduly boastful when he announced himself as a man of the world. What is it that really qualifies one of us for that dubious distinction? It is hard to say. I have known ladies who believed the term to be applicable only to those who are admitted to the penetralia of London society, to members of choice little gambling clubs, and so forth. But one may dine with royalty, and rub shoulders with the great of the earth, and be elected to clubs where a duke has been blackballed, and yet remain the veriest child. Perhaps a man of the world is born, not made, like a poet or a great general. He wants tact, and sense, and

some fine instinct that is neither, yet partakes of both. There is no reason why a drysalter should not be one of this gifted brotherhood. But Mr. Marsh was in error as to his own fitness to play so difficult a part.

‘The better of human nature,’ he repeated.

‘I am sure, sir, I am very glad of it,’ responded Violet, looking at him with wondering eyes. She had not heard a word as to Sir Robert’s recent visit, and, her window looking seawards, had not caught a glimpse of the mail phaeton, and the bright bays in their silver-mounted trappings.

‘The gentleman of whom I speak, my dear,’ said Mr. Marsh, ‘is Sir Robert Shirley.’

And then Violet, with a woman’s instinct,

knew what was coming, and prepared herself for a contest of will, but sorrowfully, for she was reluctant to vex so good a man as her quaint guardian.

‘ You have known Sir Robert Shirley now, I believe,’ Mr. Marsh began diplomatically, ‘ for some little time. He is highly thought of by our good friends the Langtons, and I hope, at any rate, that you do not dislike him.’

‘ No—no—certainly not dislike him, guardy,’ faltered out the girl, on hearing which answer Mr. Marsh assumed a smirk of satisfaction.

‘ And when a young lady does not dislike a gentleman still young, very good-looking, and eminently eligible in every point of view,’ resumed the merchant, ‘ we may safely say that a warmer feeling than mere liking may some day be hoped for. Violet,

my dear young friend, I was always an outspoken man, and must come to the point at once. Sir Robert Shirley—who is, as you are aware, a baronet of one of the earlier creations, and a man of property and position—has been here to-day to ask my consent before making you a formal proposal of marriage. There can be no doubt as to the sincerity of his attachment to yourself, and as little as to the disinterested character of his suit. Your little income, of course, he says, would be settled on yourself, and he is able, as I gather, to make a handsome provision for his wife in the event of her becoming his widow. All such arrangements you may safely leave to a business man like myself. But what I admired was the unselfish and generous nature of the man himself. Indeed, Violet, I should close my eyes, were anything to

happen to me, the more happily if I knew that you were safe under the care of such a husband as Sir Robert Shirley.'

'Do not ask me to do it—I could not—could not!' cried out Violet, like a frightened child; and then, seeing her guardian's look of surprise, she said, more calmly, 'You mean all that is good, dear sir, and, as regards Sir Robert Shirley, I thank him gratefully, I am sure, for the honour he has done me, and which I am sorry that I must refuse. But I cannot marry him. I am pledged to Don, and I do not like Sir Robert, with all his accomplishments and all his good looks. He has pleased you, it seems, guardy, but me he has not pleased, and I would never, never say yes to him, even if I had been free—which I am not.'

'You mean, you headstrong girl,' broke

out Mr. Marsh, angrily, 'that you are caught by a fair outside and a few specious words, that you prefer a low-born adventurer to a high-bred gentleman like——'

'Hush! guardy, dear guardy!' piteously interjected Violet, as the colour rose to her face and the tears mantled in her eyes. 'You are cruelly unjust to Don. He is no adventurer. No one ever had a nobler soul, or higher motives, than he. And as for his birth——'

'Why, the fellow had invented for him even the name he bears, such as it is!' broke out Mr. Marsh, in a rage. 'If I saw you Lady Shirley, I should feel that your future happiness was assured. But as for yonder lad, you never can, nor shall you, while I have a voice in the matter, throw yourself away so absurdly.'

'Do not be angry with me, sir!' sobbed

Violet. ‘I may never marry at all—it will most likely be so. But, if I am not to die an old maid, I will only marry Don.’

And then she went away, weeping, to her room, while Mr. Marsh, wrathful and disappointed, strode out into the hall, snatched his hat, and started for his constitutional walk, in no pleasant frame of mind.

CHAPTER III.

AT HELSTON HALL.

HELSTON hamlet, which consists apparently of a farm, a mill, and some four or five straggling cottages half hidden by the brushwood and boulders of a narrow glen, is in no respect comparable with the respectable village of Thorsdale. It had no post-office, no shop, no church, no chapel, and as a general rule few facilities of any kind. And although Helston Hall, a bowshot or so away, stands boldly forth on a knoll of greensward fringed with beech-trees, with

the swift trout-stream that runs down the dale swirling and broadening at the base of the mound, the grey-stone manor-house, with its steep, slated roof, is but a sorry dwelling when contrasted with the stately mansion which lords it over the hoary oaks of Thorsdale Park. It had never been one of the principal seats of the Shirley family, to whom it had come as part of the heritage of some forgotten ancestress; and, save when it was allotted as the residence of some dowager, it had seldom been inhabited. Sir Robert's London grooms growled at the damp and draughty stabling for the pampered horses, and at the deficient accommodation for themselves.

But still Sir Robert Shirley showed no sign of his being tired of Helston. He was, to be sure, often a guest beneath the grander roof of Thorsdale, but that was at

his sister's request ; nor, since Violet had ceased to be a visitor there, had the baronet been quite as compliant with the countess's wish that he should 'make things pleasant' for her motley crowd of visitors and her valetudinarian husband.

'If Constance can't get her bear to dance, it's no affair of mine to do the piping,' had been Sir Robert's unfraternal soliloquy, more than once, in response to affectionate reproaches, upon coroneted paper, as to his truancy and his neglect.

'In London, she'd drop me as she would a cast-off glove or a faded ribbon,' sneeringly remarked the worldly-wise baronet, 'and why should I consent to be a sort of Master of the Revels for her benefit, unless I can get a rich wife as payment for my services? The gold-mine is at Woodburn now.'

The room in which Sir Robert habitually sat, and undeniably the most cheerful apartment in a somewhat dreary house, bore the traditional appellation of 'My Lady's Parlour.' It was an oak-panelled room, with tall windows, facing south, and commanding a pretty view of the trout-stream and the willow-bordered mill-dam, and the alder-fringed bank opposite, and of a clump of noble beech-trees that dropped their tiny nuts and yellowing leaves into the foaming brook below. It was fairly furnished, in red silk and antique tapestry, and had probably always been a favourite room with bygone dwellers in that lonely mansion. There the baronet was sitting, near an open window that overlooked the prospect so lately described, but Sir Robert cared little for trout-stream or beech-trees. He had beside him a little table, and, as he

smoked his cigarette, he frowningly pored over a mass of closely-written calculations, neatly folded, that lay upon the table.

Sir Robert Shirley, as he gazed steadfastly, and at intervals with a quick contraction of his dark eyebrows, at the columns of figures and heedful annotations before him, might have been mistaken either for a learned mathematician or for a student of abstruse lore.

‘It’s right, I believe it’s right, or as near as can be,’ he muttered, and again glanced at the calculations that lay before him, ‘for no man can be quite safe with a martingale at *rouge et noir*. It’s like selling one’s soul to the mischief, is tampering with things of this sort. I should have been a richer man, ah, by some thousands a year, if I had never held a card at poker or baccarat in Paris, and never backed the red

at Homburg, Baden, Monaco. But this receipt does seem of sterling stuff. The lean, half-starved Polish professor that sold it to me, why did he not make a fortune of it himself? Why not, indeed? Probably for the same reason that he did not wear cleaner linen, and exchange his shabby coat for a new one—the lack of capital. When I have Violet's money to pull upon——'

'A message, Sir Robert, please, from Thorsdale Park,' said the baronet's valet, gliding in like a black shadow, and unconsciously interrupting his master's meditations as to the gambling triumphs at Monte Carlo, for which Violet's fortune would supply the sinews of war; 'one of the confidential servants brought it over, by her ladyship's orders, only to be given to yourself, sir. If you please——'

‘Oh, yes, confound it!’ grudgingly answered the baronet.

A minute more, and Glitka was in the room. Sir Robert Shirley’s eyes sparkled with an angry light, but he restrained himself, and it was with an appearance of cold composure that he said, when the door was closed,

‘You have come across from Thorsdale with a message from my sister, have you not?’

‘No, but with a message from myself!’ Glitka flashed out, as fiercely as if her next utterance would be accompanied by a dagger-stroke; ‘I am not here, Robert, on an errand from miladi your sister. What I said was a mere lie, such as is learnt but too readily among servants, such as I am now,’—she laughed bitterly here—‘to insure my not being denied admittance.

Once, Glitka had no need of such a stratagem. The handsome English cavalier did not seek, then, to shun her society.' And now there was a regretful tenderness in the girl's tone which would not have been lost upon ears less callous than those of the egotistical master of Shirley. She had dressed herself with great care for this interview, wearing, as nearly as she could, the colours that he had been wont to say, in far-off Hungary, became her the best. The silken ribbon at her throat was fastened by a brooch of yellow gold, the massive setting of a stone curious in its blended and varying hues, being what lapidaries term a fire-opal, such as are found in the Carpathians, and set by gipsy jewellers beside the Danube or the Theiss. The brooch had been one of the few presents that Sir Robert had ever made her, and

she had put it on to-day, perhaps in the vague hope that the sight of it might awaken memories of the past.

‘If you want anything of me, what is it you do want?’ querulously demanded the baronet; ‘money is scarce with me just now, but if——’

‘I do not want your money, cavalière,’ interrupted Glitka, hotly; ‘I want my husband, pledged and plighted to me in my own distant land, where the betrothal tie is held so sacred that, had I had a brother left living, he would have hunted you down, with knife or pistol, as he would have done a wolf caught in the homestead. As it is, Glitka Eberganyi must redress her own wrongs. Beware how you trifle with me!’ she added, with sudden fury, as she saw the baronet’s lip curl with its familiar sneer; ‘we Magyars

have blood in our veins that runs warmly, whether for love or hate.'

'Upon my word, Glitka,' coolly rejoined Sir Robert, 'you give yourself a great deal of unnecessary trouble. It would be better that you should hear reason, and that this persecution of me should cease. I never regarded our old love-passages and romantic talk with such seriousness as you did, and as for marrying you——'

'Why not? If you are noble, am I not noble too? Or is it only because I was poor, and have left my native country, and become a servant—I, in this frigid England of yours—for your sake?' she exclaimed.

'As for marrying you,' went on the baronet, with unruffled composure, 'I might, quite as prudently, have noosed a cord at once for my own neck. I am not

rich, my good girl. I have only the husk and hollow outside of wealth. And I cannot afford expensive luxuries, such as a marriage for the sake of love would be. The idea is absurd.'

'Robert,' said the girl, stepping forward, and laying her hand lightly upon his arm, 'I know you are not happy, and I know you are not rich. Why not renounce your plots and wiles, and the struggle of your life in England here? Glitka would make you a true wife, even now. What remains of your fortune, gilded beggary here, would go far in Hungary, where life is cheap; and, if you like it better, we would cross the ocean, and in America carve out a new career, better suited to the courage and the energy that rust here for lack of employment.'

'Upon my word, my dear creature,'

scornfully replied the baronet, 'you draw a very pretty picture of some Arcadia of the Banat or the backwoods, where you and I are to be a picturesque variation on the stale theme of Corydon and Chloe. But it won't do, and I desire that I may be spared farther annoyance. I have no wish to complain to my sister, Lady Thorsdale, but——'

'Speak to miladi your sister if you dare,' hissed out Glitka, her handsome face almost disfigured by the rage that was now uppermost; 'I am no menial to be chidden or dismissed with impunity. Say a word to the countess, and take what follows. Again, I forbid you to sell yourself for gain—ah! that treacherous face of yours changes colour, does it?—I forbid you to wed Miss Violet Mowbray, yonder, at the priest's house in Woodburn—'

parsonage, you call it—even though she be rich.’

‘But she is not rich, as it happens,’ quietly replied the baronet; ‘nor have you the least authority for coupling her name, more than that of any other young lady, with mine.’

‘No other young lady,’ responded Glitka, stamping her foot passionately upon the floor, ‘has seventy thousand pounds to bestow upon the dissembler who woos her for his wife. Ha! you wince again, and again, traitor, your false lip trembles, in spite of all your practised discipline of the world. Will you not be warned? It is not safe to mock Glitka, or to break faith with her. No Eberganyi ever deserted a friend, or forgave an enemy. Yet, yet, Robert, there is time for us to be happy, if you would be true

to old vows, and make poor Glitka your wife, as you promised.'

There was a ring of truth in the girl's voice, there was a noble frankness in her bearing, that might have softened the heart, and might have touched the conscience, of a better man. After all, the girl was as good as gold. After all, she had been true as steel to her engagement, which, according to Hungarian, and indeed German custom, is considered as absolutely binding, like the marriage rite itself. Glitka was fierce when she was angered, but then he knew how tender and true she could be, were her lover but as honest and faithful as she was, in her simple, half-barbarous way. And she was a Magyar girl of noble birth, according to law and custom—though but a farmer's daughter—and, as such, would have mar-

ried an English duke without a notion that King Cophetua was wedding, according to the old minstrel's ballad, the Beggar Maid. But Sir Robert was hard and cold, and quite out of sympathy with the wild nature of her who pleaded to him.

‘I really must,’ said the baronet, rising and laying his hand upon the bell, ‘put a stop to this kind of thing. All is over between you and me—I mean, if you would have the sense to see it. You are a servant, I am a gentleman, and we had better remember both circumstances.’ And, as he spoke, he rang the bell.

‘Beware, again I say, or you shall rue it!’ cried Glitka, speaking as rapidly as only a foreign woman can speak. ‘I have spared you, but I will spare you no more. You have spurned me from your door,

you have scorned me, and, if shame and sorrow and disgrace be your reward, you, and you alone, are to blame. I have a hold on you that you little guess. I——’

A man-servant entered.

‘Show Lady Thorsdale’s messenger out!’ ordered the baronet. ‘And let the black horse be saddled and brought round. I am going to ride.’

Without another word or glance, Glitka left him, and in less than an hour Sir Robert Shirley, mounted on his fiery black horse, had ridden off in the direction of Woodburn Parsonage.

CHAPTER IV.

MR. MARSH DISCOVERS HIS MISTAKE.

MR. MARSH, with puckered lips and an air of peculiar importance, rattled and jolted off along the newly metalled road from Woodburn to Daneborough in a hired fly. The drysalter had not dropped any hint as to his errand, but Mrs. Langton, his niece, and, for that matter, her learned husband, felt pretty sure that it related to the search for Violet's missing fortune. And, as regarded that fortune, it may be mentioned that, whereas the clergyman's

wife lent implicit belief to the legend of the lost legacy, the clergyman himself was sceptical.

‘Seventy thousand pounds,’ he had said more than once, ‘make up a lump sum too considerable to be dropped and not found. The money, rely on it, legally or illegally, has been spent long ago—that is, if it ever existed.’

But Mr. Marsh [had received a communication from Superintendent Swann, of Daneborough, which made him eager to keep an appointment which the chief of the borough police had ventured to make on behalf of his employer. In a flurried condition of mind he set out for the rendezvous.

‘In front of the Imperial Hotel,’ muttered Mr. Marsh to himself, as he rolled along towards the sea-port town; ‘in front of

the Imperial Hotel! I suppose I shall know the jade when I see her.'

The whole affair was something out of tune with the quiet tenor of the merchant's life, and as he sped along towards Daneborough he sighed at the remembrance of the tranquil joys he had deserted, the snug dinners, the whist, the chess-playing, amidst a limited circle of old cronies, the long days of peaceful angling amongst the aits and reed-beds of the Thames, undisturbed by anything worse than some snorting steam-launch as [it rushed by. But he was quite firm as to doing his duty, as he understood it, towards Violet, his ward.

Mr. Marsh did not on this occasion deem it expedient to drive direct to the Imperial Hotel. He bade the man who drove the Woodburn fly to set him down at the

upper end of High Street, where there stands a decent place of public entertainment, bearing the now almost historic appellation of the 'King's Arms.' Here the drysalter alighted

'You will wait for me,' he said. 'I shall be back in an hour or so.'

And then on foot he made his way down the steep High Street, and turned the corner into that broader and shorter thoroughfare which bears the name of Tontine Street. It had not a very prosperous or bustling air, that artificial artery of borough life, which had been called into being by the tedious speculation that is known as a 'Tontine.' Whoever might have been the longest liver of the adventurous subscribers, and so, as survivor, had become owner of all, must have left disgusted at seeing how mildewed were the

stuccoed fronts of the tall houses, how dejected was the aspect of a few shops yet unshuttered, and how gloomy and insolvent was the air of the big useless hotel that was the principal ornament of the street.

Mr. Marsh had not long to wait. His eyes immediately lit upon a female form, graceful enough, and well attired, that was moving to and fro in front of the Imperial Hotel, not slowly and wearily, as is the wont of most of those who keep such comfortless appointments, but with quick, impatient steps, and something of the air of a tigress treading the floor of her cage.

‘That’s the foreign woman, for a hundred!’ exclaimed the merchant, at the first glimpse of this active, restless figure; and when the figure turned so as to face

him, and he caught sight of a pale, dark face, with very bright eyes and very black hair, he was quite assured as to his having guessed correctly.

‘Mademoiselle Glitka?’ he said, with an awkward bow.

Glitka bent her haughty head as some savage princess might have done.

‘You are Mr. Marsh?’ she said. ‘Good; I have much to say to you. The innocent must be protected, and the guilty punished. Is it not so?’

As she spoke, she looked fixedly in the drysalter’s face, and it almost seemed to him as if her fiery eyes scorched him, while her low, earnest voice rang in his ear like the vengeful blast of a trumpet. Never before had the worthy Ephraim encountered concentrated passion such as Glitka’s air and expression implied. Even

her very calmness had in it something terrible, like the stillness of the tropical sea that precedes the outburst of the tornado.

‘I think,’ said Mr. Marsh, nervously afraid of being observed, and conscious that already two or three of the passers-by had turned their heads to look at him and his strange companion. ‘I think that we should discuss the matters in question more quietly and more comfortably indoors. If you will follow me——’

At Mr. Marsh’s invitation, Glitka followed him into the adjacent hotel.

‘A private sitting-room, waiter,’ said the London merchant; and soon he found himself in one of the dismal little parlours—that were but too many and too tenantless—in the semi-bankrupt Imperial Hotel, face to face with Lady Thorsdale’s foreign

lady's-maid. Glitka was the first to speak.

‘Sir,’ said the Hungarian girl, ‘I believe you to be a good and a just man. Is it true that Sir Shirley—Robert the Cavalière—is to marry this ward of yours, this Miss Violet?’

‘I hope so—I trust he will; but why?’ began the drysalter, wonderingly; but Glitka cut him short.

‘Because I wanted to be sure—quite sure,’ she cried out, furiously, ‘before I set my foot upon his head, to crush it, gilded snake that he is!—ah, traitor, traitor! when will you learn that it is wisest for a man to be true?—hear me, sir! You would give your ward, your charge, to this baronet, because he is rich, high in the world’s regard, honourable, good. Is it not so? But, how if I tell you—I that have loved, and now hate—

that it is a fair outside, and all within is false and evil? How, if I say that this titled suitor is not only ruined, not only a spendthrift, but a knave that has broken the law, a rogue that conspires with a ruffian to cheat your Miss Mowbray of the concealed fortune for which he seeks her hand—a wretch destined to the chains and the prison that await the forger and the thief!’

Mr. Marsh positively gasped, as if the volubility of this accusation had taken his breath away. He glanced at the accuser. She looked, with her flaming eyes and resolute face, very much in earnest; but still he felt that he must not be borne down by mere glibness of assertion.

‘It is a good old principle of our English law, mademoiselle,’ he doggedly made answer, ‘that a man is to be con-

sidered innocent until he has been proved guilty. Now, all I have seen of Sir Robert, and all I have heard of him, except from yourself, is very much to his credit. If you want me to change my opinion, you must give me proofs.'

'You shall have them,' said Glitka, readily, and, as she spoke, she exhibited a folded paper, which she held, half hidden, in her gloved hand.

'Now, before I give you proofs, have you anything that you would wish to ask me?'

'You are—as, I believe, that you admitted in conversation with Superintendent Swann,' said the London merchant, 'the writer of the anonymous letter which I received in town. You are also a bitter enemy of Sir Robert's?'

'Yes, because I loved him,' interrupted

the Hungarian girl, with her dark eyes blazing out like those of a hurt wild beast that turns on the hunter. 'I was his promised bride—we were betrothed—and he threw me off—me, the Magyar girl, and an Eberganyi, free and noble—me, who would be allowed entry at the Kaiser's Court at Vienna, where your mere rich are shut out. And I had no brother left alive—Max and Yanos died with their regiments in the war—so I must punish instead of they, who would have been prompt to take up a sister's quarrel. Yes, I *hate* the man! Now, hear me.'

And in rapid, burning words, Lady Thorsdale's maid related how she had, in the room habitually occupied by Sir Robert Shirley at Thorsdale Hall, discovered, in a drawer, the compromising

letter, signed, 'Rufus Crouch,' which had first caused her to send her own anonymous communication to Mr. Marsh himself in London. Then she told how, while the fine company in the grand mansion were at dinner, she had stolen upstairs, and had possessed herself of the letter in question, which the baronet, habitually careless, had not missed.

'Here it is!' she said, as she thrust it into the drysalter's hand.

He read it, not without many an inward twinge of mortification and annoyance, but he was, above all things, a worthy man, and his sense of right prevailed over the slight to his vanity.

'The base hypocrite!' he exclaimed; 'the rascally dissembler! Why, his scoundrel of a confederate had apprised him of the exact amount of my ward's fortune

weeks before he came to make a boast of his disinterested intentions to me! May I keep this letter, mademoiselle? You will be rewarded, I need not say, for your help in unmasking an impostor.'

'Reward me—give me money—your sovereigns and your bank-notes, perhaps,' retorted Glitka, with a hard, fierce laugh. 'Yes, that would be well for one of your English maids, but I have only one reward to seek! Now, sir, listen. The letter I have placed in your hands will, I hope, prove the ruin of the designs of him to whom it was sent. But I have a new weapon wherewith to strike at that hard, pitiless heart.'

And then, rapidly and volubly as before, she narrated how she had chanced to overhear in that portion of the shrubbery at Thorsdale which bordered on the

park, through which there was a public right-of-way, a conversation between Sir Robert Shirley and an ill-looking ruffian, whom she easily identified with the writer of the threatening letter. She had no hesitation in avowing that she played the spy on her employer's brother whenever her duties rendered it possible, prompted by jealousy and resentment, and on this occasion she had overheard, herself unperceived, a portion of what was said.

‘He, Crouch, menaced Sir Robert always. He could, he said, send him to the gyves and the prison, as he could the commonest forger and the commonest thief. And the great, proud gentleman spoke the ruffian fair, and gave gold, and promised much. He had won over Mr. Marsh, Miss Mowbray's guardian, so he said, and should have his influence on

his side. And Crouch was to have his share of the young lady's fortune; I did not hear how much, but they bargained. Then gay voices were heard of company coming, and Crouch slunk off, and climbed over the fence that led into the park. That was on Tuesday.'

'Do you know who this fellow Crouch may be?' asked bewildered Mr. Marsh.

'Yes. I learned from the servants,' said Glitka, 'that the man is one of the jet-hunters, a gold-digger from Australia, a man of ill-repute, who lives alone, like a hermit, on the moors. Now I must go, or miladi will miss me.'

And, with a quiet bow, she went. Mr. Marsh drove back to Woodburn Parsonage with very different feelings from those which he had previously entertained towards the titled suitor for Violet Mowbray's hand.

CHAPTER V.

SIR ROBERT IS BAFFLED.

MOUNTED on his fine black horse, Sir Robert Shirley, as he rode through the straggling village street of Woodburn, looked the very type of a gallant gentleman and a bold rider. No one who saw how calm was his pale, passionless face, could possibly have divined the stormy interview with Glitka through which he had so lately passed, or have detected in his air the nervousness that usually besets a suitor who is about to make an offer

of his hand. Yet such was the baronet's purpose. Confidently he rode in at the open gate of the parsonage garden, and, flinging the bridle to the gardener's lad, who ran up, touching his cap, to do the office of a groom, he rang the bell and was promptly admitted. Smiling Mrs. Langton was alone in the drawing-room.

‘My husband is somewhere about the parish,’ said the clergyman's wife, ‘and Mr. Marsh, too, is from home. Violet is upstairs, with a young friend of hers, Miss Grace Warburton.’

‘My visit to-day, if I may venture to say so, is to Miss Mowbray,’ replied the baronet. ‘I daresay, Mrs. Langton, you are aware of the reason of my coming?’

Mrs. Langton's kindly face assumed an arch expression.

‘Sir Robert,’ she said, cheerfully, ‘a

little bird has whispered to me how it is. I am certain Violet will be glad, and I am sure I shall congratulate her and you with all my heart.'

As Mrs. Langton spoke she rang the bell.

'Tell Miss Mowbray that, if her friend can spare her, Sir Robert Shirley has called expressly to see her.'

The maid who received the message was as demure as a housemaid should be, but even she had a sly twinkle in her pale blue eye, for servants know much, and guess more, and marrying and proposals are the romance of the basement storey, precisely as they give a stimulus to the life of those who are waited upon instead of serving. But the maid was very serious, and indeed scared, as she came back to say,

‘Miss Mowbray does not wish to receive Sir Robert Shirley. Miss Mowbray requests that he will not give himself the trouble to wait.’

The words, uttered with white and trembling lips, were still very distinctly spoken. The baronet sprang to his feet, and a little crimson reddened his pale cheek.

‘Upon my word,’ he said, sternly, ‘I am not used to language such as this. If Miss Violet Mowbray really sent me such a message——’

‘The dear child never meant to offend you, Sir Robert,’ bleated out Mrs. Langton.

Sir Robert paid no attention to the clergyman’s wife.

‘Well?’ he said.

‘Those are the very words the young

lady told me to say,' was the dogged answer of the housemaid, who, after all, had only done her duty as a messenger, and resented the fierce looks of the visitor. And what she said was evidently true.

Nettled by the insult, furious at the thwarting of his projects, and still smarting under the effect of Glitka's anger and Glitka's threats, the baronet got himself out of the drawing-room as best he might, scarcely deigning a word of adieu to startled Mrs. Langton, and rewarding the services of the gardener's boy without with a growl instead of a shilling, as he mounted his horse. Then he set spurs to the fiery animal he rode, and dashed off at speed, like the Wild Huntsman of German, or the Wild Darrell of English story, rattling through peaceful Woodburn with

swift-beating hoofs that struck fire from the flint stones of the road. The gallant horse obeyed the rein and the spur and the furious voice of the rider, and sped along the upland road like a thunderbolt.

At last Sir Robert, the fever of his blood somewhat appeased, drew his rein as he caught sight of a milestone that he knew to be within a couple of miles of Helston. It would not do to ride up to his own hall-door with his horse flecked with foam and breathing hard, while the master had his hat pulled down over his frowning brows, and his whip tight-clenched in his ungloved right hand. The baronet knew that servants' tattling talk must not be disregarded. He had been refused an interview with Miss Mowbray, and he was disappointed and wrathful, but he did not wish the facts to be hawked about the

country, published at Thorsdale Park, and retailed in Belgravian servants' halls. So he pulled up, patted the neck of his powerful black horse, snorting and indignant, but as generously amenable to human caresses and pleasant words as a thoroughbred horse almost always is, and composed his own features into the customary look of passionless calm.

‘Well met, Sir R.,’ said a hoarse, deep voice, at the sound of which the baronet winced impatiently; ‘I was on my way to Helston, to look you up, but perhaps out on the high road we can chat more conveniently.’

The baronet turned to confront Rufus Crouch. There was an unholy look of ferocity in the fellow's bloodshot eyes, which told of gin lately imbibed; but, to use the super-accurate phraseology of a

London policeman giving evidence at Bow Street, if he had been drinking he was not drunk. In his hand was a heavy black-thorn stick, gnarled and fresh-cut.

‘What do you want with me, you fool?’ demanded the baronet.

Rufus glared at him.

‘I want a precious lot, Sir R.,’ responded the ex-gold-digger, after a pause, during which it seemed as though he were meditating whether or not to spring, like some savage dog, at the throat of his aristocratic accomplice. ‘I want to be rid of this currish life, and out of this rotten country, and back in old Australia, but as a master this time, mind ye! not a man. I could play boss, and be hanged to it, as well as another, and pay my ten shillings a day to a chap, and take my thirty shilling or my brace of guineas out of his

labour, and so use him up and be done with him. Even without the gold I could do the trick there twice as fast as with capital I could do it here, 'cause I'm not mealy-mouthed, nor yet white-fisted, not I, and have been a digger, and a dray-driver, and stockman myself. But, to set up, I require my share of the swag.'

'Of what swag, my talkative friend, do you want your share?' asked the baronet, with much asperity.

'Why, of the heiress's seventy thousand pounds—what else?' gruffly rejoined the ex-gold-digger; 'and mind, Sir R., not one rap less than twenty-five thousand, not twenty, will satisfy yours truly, and——'

'You dolt!' broke in Sir Robert, 'you may keep your higgling back till the market is open. That will-o'-the-wisp of

the big sum of ready-money, that lured me down here, is as a very Jack-of-lantern as ever led a silly swain into a quagmire. Even if the girl has a right to this money——’

‘True as death and taxes she has, Sir R.,’ protested Crouch, looking serious.

‘Even then we don’t live in a country where young ladies can be married against their will,’ retorted the baronet; ‘your heiress, I tell you, turns out to be of less malleable stuff than we supposed, and her money is as much out of my reach as if it were fifty fathoms deep beneath the sea. She insults me—won’t see me—will have none of me—even though I have duped that old dotard of a drysalter, the guardian, into bucklering up my cause. I’m sure there’s some young lover.’

‘And I can give a shrewd guess, Sir R.,

as to who the young chap is,' interrupted Crouch. 'I'll stake anything it's that beggarly upstart, Don. I heard he had been caught spooning and mooning with Miss Violet. I heard he had been forbid the house, down at the parson's. He's what the girls call handsome, and——'

'I know he is,' said Sir Robert, with an action of conviction, and with a bitter laugh, 'and I wish him—dead.'

'Now hark to me, Sir R.,' exclaimed Crouch, drawing near, and speaking earnestly, but in a voice that he instinctively lowered; 'come in to my terms—the five-and-twenty thousand, out of the new Lady Shirley's tin—and he, this beggarly gentleman foundling, *shall* be dead. Girls change their minds, don't they, just as weather-cocks veer about when the wind shifts?

and, once Don's out of the way, you can make your running with the heiress. It's that lad who stands in your light. Well: I'll engage, for the sake of old grudges, and for my share of the plunder, to put him out of the way. D'ye hear?'

'I don't much like being mixed up in that sort of thing,' said the baronet, hesitatingly; 'I wish the youngster were well out of my way, but——'

'But you do not care to swing for him, as the phrase is, Sir R.,' put in the ruffian at his side; 'but take comfort! there'll be no rope for me, nor for you. I can do the job quietly. Listen here. I'm a jet-hunter, and if I go to him with a message from old Obadiah the captain, telling him there are mates in peril, and lives to save, he'll come off at once, for all he's in Lord Thorsdale's employment. The gang work

near Daneborough now. I'll trump up a story about how some of the weaklings have ventured out, and got quagged, or tide-surrounded on a rock. My young whipster will start off along with me, by the cliff-path, and I'll be short of breath and drop behind, yet follow close at his heels along that narrow, winding path, which overhangs the beach. Hordle Cliff is a sheer six hundred feet high, and I know a place where there are rocks beneath, edged like razors.'

'Well?' said the baronet, trying to harden his heart, and repressing with difficulty a shudder. He was not a good man, but the coarse villainy of his confederate almost sickened him, and more so because he remembered to have heard, from the man's own lips, how Don had saved his worthless life.

‘One push, between the shoulders!’ chuckled Crouch, thrusting out his great hands and counterfeiting the action so as to suit the words, ‘and over goes my young lordling to the crabs and sand-eels in the rock-pools below. Nobody sees me do it. Nobody dreams that I’d a reason for doing it. “Poor young chap!” says every one, “he was always too venturesome.” And as for Miss Violet, while the tear is in the eye, which is always a soft time with women, my advice is, cut in, Sir R., and win.’

‘I’ll leave the details, Rufus, to your larger experience in such matters,’ said the baronet, still wavering. ‘If it really could be safely done, and effectually——’

‘Effectually!’ jeered Crouch; ‘six hundred feet to fall, and on those black, sharp-edged rocks, like a range of knife-blades,

and at low tide, too, as I'll take care, for if the sea were in, a strong swimmer might—but I'll chose a time when there shall be nothing softer than stone to drop upon. Six hundred feet! It makes you giddy to look down that cliff. I'll do it. And I must have my five-and-twenty thou., Sir R.'

'You will have earned it, Crouch, if by your agency I become the possessor of Miss Mowbray's fortune,' said the baronet, cautiously, and in a very low voice.

'But,' said Rufus, roughly, as he glared at his titled friend, 'you mind how you break faith with me, Sir Robert Shirley, Baronet, once I've risked scragging for your sake. Try to cheat me out of sixpence of my due, and keep me in this miserable country for above three months more, and see if you don't go to gaol as

a forger, and give the newspapers the fun of printing leading articles about the disgrace of a fellow like you, with a handle to his name, and——’

Sir Robert had an almost fiendish temper, kept in check usually by habit and self-discipline, but he had had much to annoy him that day, and now the pent-up volcano blazed up into flame.

‘You cur!’ he exclaimed; ‘you low-born hound! You dare, dare you, to threaten a gentleman!’

CHAPTER VI.

‘YOU HAVE SAVED MY LIFE.’

SIR ROBERT SHIRLEY, it has been mentioned more than once, was naturally inclined to be violent in his moods. But there are many men, and perhaps more women, among us, who have early put themselves under strong moral discipline on this point, and who carry about with them a bad temper as harmlessly as some Fakeer in India leads with him a tame tiger.

Throughout that day the baronet had

had much to chafe him, and Crouch's offensive threats and vulgar insolence had at last fanned into flame the smouldering embers of his wrath. Had he not known the man from boyhood, perhaps his worldly philosophy would have better enabled him to endure the taunts and menaces of his coarse confederate. But to be braved and insulted by a born vassal of Shirley, so to speak, by one who had eaten his father's bread, was too much for Sir Robert in his then state of irritation. Had his very life depended on it, the instinct of patrician anger would have been too strong at that moment for his prudence, and he avenged much disrespect and many affronts by two sharp cuts which, with his gold-mounted riding-whip, he dealt Rufus across the face.

The immediate effect upon Crouch of

the stinging blows he had received was to make the ex-gold-digger and possible bush-ranger stand as still as if he had been some hideous effigy of a man carved in stone. But then his native ferocity awoke, and it was with a yell like that of a wild beast that the ruffian sprang forward, clutched the bridle of Sir Robert’s gallant horse, and forced him back upon his haunches. The terrified animal snorted and reared arrow-straight, pawing the air with his fore-feet, and falling back with a crash upon his rider. Stunned by the shock, and oppressed by the weight of the fallen horse, the baronet lay helpless, only stirring feebly in his weak efforts to rise.

‘*I’ll pay you, Sir R.!*’ growled Crouch, whirling up his club, and dealing a furious stroke at Sir Robert’s prostrate head.

The very violence of the blow in part

protected the destined victim, since the heavy stick, dashing off his hat and grazing his temple, struck into the soft turf at the roadside.

‘I’ll pay you!’ again—and this time with the accompaniment of a volley of savage curses—snarled Crouch; and he swung his cudgel aloft, and, grasping it with both his powerful hands, aimed a second stroke, which would probably have proved fatal, at the bare head of the fallen man, who now lay quite still, with half-shut eyes, and a thin thread of blood crossing his white forehead.

‘Hold there! stop!’ cried a ringing, clear young voice, as the sound of hurrying feet was heard; and the would-be murderer, club in hand, wheeled round, to find himself face to face with the man whom, of all men, he hated and feared

the most—the youth whose skill and courage had saved him from the Soldiers’ Slough—Don!

At another time the ruffian would probably have shrunk from a contest with his former preserver; just then he was desperate.

‘Don’t interfere with me, youngster, if you care to keep a whole skin, and bones unbroken!’ said Crouch, brandishing his cudgel.

Meanwhile the black horse, which had been floundering, as fallen horses will, had struggled to its feet, and stood, panting, with streaming rein and distended nostrils, a few yards off.

‘I am interfering, comrade,’ replied Don, resolutely, but with no sign of ill-temper, ‘to save you from yourself. That cudgel of yours——’

‘Try the heft of it!’ answered Crouch, savagely, as he lifted the club, and struck at Don with all his force.

But Don, whose eyes were quick and his movements agile, eluded the blow, sprang forward, and had closed with the gold-digger in a moment.

‘Now I’ve got you, my Jemmy Jes-samy fine gentleman!’ muttered Rufus, as the grapple began, for in all his many meditations concerning Don he had always felt assured that at close quarters he was by far the stronger of the two.

He had wrestled often, in earlier days, in that west-country where he was born, and where ‘Old Rufus has the hug of a bear!’ was a not infrequent remark on the part of defeated opponents. The man’s blood was up. He was by nature and habit a bully, and had much of self-

confidence and much of cowardly ferocity to replace the real valour that never animates a heart so base as his. Therefore he began the struggle with the certainty of victory.

‘I’ll spoil his pretty face before I’ve done with him!’ muttered the wretch, as he put out his ungainly strength in a great effort.

It was all to no purpose. Rufus found himself in a grip such as, in his whole life, he had never experienced, and felt as though both breastbone and ribs must give way, while he vainly gasped for breath, and vainly, with lessening vigour, tried his wrestling tricks. Don, young as he was, seemed to have muscles and sinews of steel, and it was not long before his bulky antagonist’s fierce face grew livid with pain and despair. Then—

Crouch never afterwards could realise how—the brawny man felt that he was snatched up from the ground, like a tree suddenly uprooted, and next he fell with a crash upon the earth, while sparks unnumbered seemed to dance before his confused eyes.

The first thing that he distinctly saw, when at length he looked up, was the figure of his conqueror, Don, standing with one foot upon the bludgeon that he had wrenched from Crouch's hand, while he held the bridle of the frightened horse, patting its glossy neck the while, and speaking to it soothingly.

But Don's voice was stern enough as he addressed the gold-digger, now slowly rising to his feet.

‘Your wisest plan, mate, is to take yourself off, and, if you have any con-

science left, to be thankful that you have been saved from a great crime, and the hangman’s noose as its penalty. I am sorry to be harsh with a jet-hunter, but I am more sorry to find that one of our company could deserve it. Now go !

The last words were so imperatively spoken that Crouch mechanically obeyed, and with crestfallen air and dogged mien slunk off, feeling the while stealthily in the baggy pockets of the short, loose coat he wore, as if in search of knife or pistol.

But either the gold-digger was unarmed, or, which is probable, he had been too much cowed to make use of such a weapon, for at last he slunk off homewards, like a baffled wild beast creeping sullenly towards its lair.

Don, passing the bridle of the black horse over a gate-post that stood near,

proceeded to assist Sir Robert Shirley, who was now stirring uneasily as he lay, trying to rise. The baronet staggered as he regained his feet, and would have fallen but for Don's support.

‘Are you much hurt?’ asked the young man, compassionately.

Don knew the baronet, and the baronet him, after that odd fashion of semi-acquaintance which, in a thinly-peopled neighbourhood, sometimes prevails. And, perhaps, neither of these two had much cause to like the other, rivals as they were for the hand of Violet Mowbray.

We have seen how far along the path of guilt and treachery Sir Robert was willing to go for the purpose of removing an obstacle to his mercenary projects. But Don was of a different mould: and in the baronet, in his present condition,

he only saw a wounded fellow-creature, to whom, as such, it was his nature to be tender.

‘I am afraid you are badly hurt,’ he repeated, gently.

‘It’s.—it’s all right!’ muttered Sir Robert, leaning heavily on his preserver. ‘Yes, it’s all right. I was a trifle dizzy at the first, but I’m quite right now.’

The baronet was not very brave, but he was a public schoolboy—an Etonian—and still felt what many an English boy of less expensive education has felt: that it behoved him to make light of pain and danger. We English, had we been prone to make the most of our hurts and our hardships, could scarcely have filled so large a place in the world’s regard as we do.

‘You must let me take care of you as

far as your home,' said Don, as he noticed how weak and white Sir Robert Shirley looked. 'Helston, as luck will have it, is not very far from here. Do you think, Sir Robert, that you have strength enough to mount your horse? I could walk beside you.'

The baronet shook his head.

'You're a good fellow,' he said, feebly, 'and a gentleman, Mr. Don, if ever I saw one. It must have been Heaven's own mercy that sent you just when——'

He shuddered at the recollection. It was his first experience of how savage violence can, for the moment, bear down the barriers that hem it in. And, too, he had learnt a lesson. During his long and dubious intercourse with his rascally ally he had felt as if, the hollow truce being broken and hostilities proclaimed, he was

a match for the villain with whom he had leagued himself. But the villain had defeated him as easily as if he had been a child. And it was due to Don—young Don, the hated and despised foundling of the sea-beach—that the haughty master of Shirley was not lying now, with a smashed skull, by the roadside.

‘I can’t get on the horse. Never mind me; some cart will come by,’ said the baronet, in a thin, reedy voice.

‘Perhaps, sir, you could walk if I held you up. Helston Hall is within half-an-hour from here,’ suggested Don; and, Sir Robert murmuring a weak assent, the young man struck into the lane hard by, leading the black horse, and bearing upon his strong arm the tottering form of his rescued rival.

The black horse went quietly now, resting its velvet muzzle at times on Don's wrist, and whinnying low, as horses will at a period of excitement, and when they find a human being whom they can trust, and whom they feel really to sympathise with their natures. Sir Robert was a good rider, but a bad horse-master. In his eyes a horse was a horse—a mere animated machine to carry him over the ground. But all animals seemed to recognise a friend in Don.

As he feebly walked towards Helston, propped up by the strong arm of his rescuer, that unquiet inward monitor which we call conscience cost the baronet many a qualm. There he was, leaning upon Don as he would have done upon a brother. It was Don's courage and Don's strength that had saved him from the bludgeon of the burly

ruffian who had unhorsed him and beaten him down. He owed his life to this gallant young fellow—once a jet-hunter, and now a clerk in the land-office of his sister's noble husband. And yet, but a few minutes before, he had been ‘consenting to the death’—to use the Scriptural expression—of the youth who had come so boldly and so frankly to his help in the hour of need. He had not been as explicit as Crouch had with regard to the conspiracy. He had not, as Crouch had, gloated over the latter's fell intention to push Don over the beetling path, to perish on the jagged rocks below, nor had he dilated on the formidable height of Hordle Cliff, and the certainty of success for the foul design. But none the less had Sir Robert agreed to pay over a large portion of Violet Mowbray's fortune,

should he gain it through the putting out of the way of Violet's lover.

There was not much conversation, naturally, on the slow walk along the lane that led to Helston Hall. Once the baronet plucked up spirit enough to say what he thought of the late aggressor.

‘The brute—the coward—the savage!—that Crouch, I mean, a son of my father's bailiff, a dog who was always glad to come sneaking up to me at Shirley, and carry my second gun, or run my errands—the beast!’ ejaculated Sir Robert. ‘But, if there's law or justice in England, I'll——’

He stopped short here confusedly. Perhaps he had remembered that Crouch, too, might have ugly revelations to make in a court of justice.

‘The man, I believe,’ said Don, tolerantly, ‘is but partly responsible for his

actions. He is mad drunk sometimes. He was so to-day, till the fall I gave him sobered him. I hope this may serve as a lesson to the fellow. But he is a bad sort of man, and we jet-hunters will be well rid of him. I suppose, Sir Robert, that he did not attack you for the mere purpose of robbery?’

‘He—I—yes; but I feel rather faint, somehow,’ murmured the baronet; and he said no more until he reached his own stable-yard, with the grey old manor-house towering aloft, and his serving-men came hurrying to conduct the horse to his stable, and to express their conventional horror at the cut forehead and pallor and feebleness of their master.

‘I may leave you now,’ said Don, with his bright smile.

‘If you please, I should like to shake

hands with you,' said Sir Robert, hesitatingly ; and he held Don's hand for a moment. ' You have saved my life ; and, whatever I may be, I shall not forget what I owe you.'

CHAPTER VII.

WYVERN, EARL WYVERN.

THERE was a stir and a bustle at Thorsdale Hall. A Triton was to come among the minnows there. Changes, no doubt, there had been among the guests whom the countess's efforts had secured when first Lord Thorsdale chose to bury himself and his wife, during the heyday of the London season, in the seclusion of the country. Some of the invited had business to attend to, others had engagements to fulfil; but jovial Captain Crasher, and lively little

Mrs. Scoresby, with the sleepy colonel, whose duty in life it was to be the husband of a professional beauty, and Lady Paget and her insignificant husband, Sir Augustus, and Lord and Lady David Todhunter, yet stuck to their comfortable quarters. Charley Fitzgerald had, indeed, been called away by the severity of an exacting colonel and the rules of the Horse Guards, to do regimental duty at Coventry, but half a dozen young subalterns of the Guards or the Light Cavalry were there in the place, and several civilian dandies, who never donned scarlet except for hunting purposes, had joined the muster.

It was not the London season now. It was August. There were grouse to be shot, and, short of Scotland, few moors promised more broods, or stronger on the wing, than those on the well-preserved

territories of the wealthy Lord Thorsdale. The earl, personally, never fired a gun. He had even a dislike to the rude banging of double barrels discharged, within earshot, by other people. But his partridges and his ground game cost him a good deal. His pheasants, by the time they reached his larder, or filled the baskets that great landowners are expected to send to their less fortunate friends, were ruinously dear, and his grouse were especially expensive. In a country so thickly populated as ours, even in Yorkshire, you must hire a man to see that not one, out of some ten or twelve men dwelling near, bears off your grouse-eggs, or nets or shoots your young brood; and then you must buy eggs and young birds from the accommodating dealers, must have drivers as well as keepers and

watchers, and task the skill of your French cook to satisfy the hunger of the gentlemen whom you have invited condescendingly to slaughter your *feræ naturæ*.

From a guest's point of view, the Thorsdale shootings that year turned out exceedingly well. It had been dry enough for the young birds neither to be drowned when they first stagger about after the chirping parent hen, nor to sicken mysteriously, while it had not been dry enough to stint the supply of insect food. The earl's watchers, the earl's keepers, perhaps stirred to unusual efficiency by the proximity of their noble master, had shot or trapped the pole-cats and hill-foxes, driven off the amateur poachers, and compromised with or prosecuted to conviction the professional poachers who were once re-

garded as very interesting innocents by a large section of the British public, but are now viewed in their natural character of slinking, furtive-eyed, unscrupulous purloiners. There were plenty of grouse, a fine head of hares—not yet, of course, these last, legally assailable, any more than the brown coveys of partridge cheepers nestling on the headlands; the house was roomy, the cook an artist, the entertainers persons of rank. There could scarcely at that time of year have been a lack of guests.

The particular guest of guests who was now expected at Thorsdale was in the social scale a heavier fish, and one of more gorgeous aspect, than had yet been netted. As yet, Lord David Todhunter, an unassuming, jovial aristocrat, who was willing to stay almost for ever, so long as the

fare was good and the style of living liberal, had been the most imposing member of the company. Lord David, the brother of a marquis, and thus a lord by courtesy, was, in fact, a silver-gilt article that we agree to class as gold. But Wyvern, Earl Wyvern—or more correctly, as the *Peerage* puts it, the Right Honourable Alfred Henry Talbot Wyvern, Earl Wyvern, Viscount Ludlow, Baron Downton and Gresford—was what our French neighbours describe as a personage, quite as great a man, so far as wealth and pedigree went, as Lord Thorsdale, with whom he was somehow remotely connected by ties of kindred.

‘He’s one of your awful diplomatic swells—know’s what Russia’s really up to, and understands the dodges of Germany and France, as you *don’t* understand, my

boy, the odds you ought to take on the Doncaster Leger,' Captain Crasher observed, in confidential intercourse with one of his admiring pupils as to sporting matters. And indeed Lord Wyvern had held high ambassadorial rank, and had been charged with extraordinary ambassadorial duties abroad. It is not always, of course, that the Foreign Office can find such a man as Earl Wyvern, so rich, so high in station, so able to undertake duties that, in these halcyon times of ceaseless telegrams and newspaper-accredited interviews, usually fall to the lot of estimable public servants of a different degree. The earl was a childless widower. He was still of middle age. He was clever enough, had he preferred it, to have made a figure in our home politics, and rich enough, had he so pleased, to have been noted in London

society. As it was, much of his life had been spent, officially or unofficially, on the Continent.

Lord Wyvern arrived ; and Lord Thorsdale, his entertainer, actually paid him the compliment of dining for three consecutive days at table. Nothing could be more erratic than the conduct of the noble owner of Thorsdale Park. Sometimes for days his guests saw nothing of him ; he was reported as ill, and his countess trembled as he consulted fresh physicians, talked of the Rocky Mountains, and mentioned the dreaded name of Schültz the courier. Then, in quite the homely style of a breakfast-table benevolent despot, the earl would appear at the morning meal, and skim the newspapers, and join in general conversation as if he had been a mere domestic magnate.

One secret of Lord Thorsdale's changed demeanour was that, for the first time, he had a visitor whom he could respect. The former partakers of his hospitality had not stood high in his regard. Lady Piminy, and, for that matter, Sir Nym, her husband, and noisy Captain Crasher, and Charley Fitzgerald and his compeers, and the Pagets, and the Scoresbys, had been of light metal, one and all. Jolly, kind Lord David Todhunter and his meek wife were simply aristocratic trencher-folk and hangers-on. The Piminy girls were showy merchandise, hawked about to tempt somebody to marry them. Miss Martin was a pert, smart young person, who acted a *soubrette* so well that it seemed a pity she should ever be divorced from the coquetish cap and bepocketed apron of a spruce lady's-maid. The rest of the men, and the

rest of the women, had all in their turn been weighed, and found wanting. But Lord Wyvern was, as the learned and highly-salaried Scotch gardener observed to Mr. Bartlett, the land-agent, 'a bird of another hackle.' The other earl, his host, who had known him well in much earlier days, took the pains to try to please and satisfy this new guest, and seemed almost nervously reluctant to appear in the character of a mere whimsical valetudinarian. Truth to tell, Lord Thorsdale was a little afraid of Lord Wyvern, whom he felt secretly to be of a tougher fibre than that of which the indolent dilettante was himself composed, and who had done real work in the world, and done it, too, with the grave, unselfish earnestness which seemed the very key-note of his nature.

It had been Lord Wyvern's lot to hold,

at very critical moments, posts of high responsibility at foreign Courts, and no envoy had ever discharged his difficult duties better—as undisturbed by the silly or spiteful diatribes of ill-informed newspaper critics on his forbearance, as he was indifferent to the fulsome praises that were heaped upon him when the fickle weathercock of popular opinion had veered round. Even his enemies—and a successful diplomatist must have enemies—respected him, and acknowledged the dignity and self-control of a statesman who put up with no affront, but whose sound rule of conduct it had been never in the name of his country to threaten unless he were sure to be able to strike.

There was not a visitor at Thorsdale Park who did not feel it, somehow or other, a sort of distinction to be an inmate

of the house that sheltered so famous a fellow-guest as Earl Wyvern, a man of whose name the papers had rarely anything but good to say, and who had kept himself clear from the ready ridicule and the belittling nicknames that must be faced by those who win their laurels in the home arena of English politics. We are mild, compared with our thorough-going ancestors, as good haters, for the most part, as even the dictionary doctor could have wished them to be, and our keenest caricaturists dip their etching-points in new milk, as compared with the savage pencil of hard-hitting Gilray. But still, it is not possible to sit on the Treasury bench, or to lead Her Majesty's Opposition, without being morally tarred and feathered, hooted, jeered, and supplied with a fool's cap that fits more or less ; for

every man has a weak side to his nature, and his foes are quick to find it.

There was that in Lord Wyvern's bearing, and in the stern, calm look of his handsome face, which seemed to forbid raillery and to make disrespect impossible. He was a man of middle age, tall in figure, with dark hair dashed with grey, and thoughtful eyes. His manners were pleasing, somewhat formal and over-courteous, perhaps, for our modern canons of taste, but then it was pardoned in one who had been on intimate terms with kings and emperors, and royal and imperial highnesses of both sexes, during the best years of his life. Nor did the ambassador disdain to join, to some extent, in the every-day amusements of those amongst whom he suddenly found himself cast.

‘Will you join the grouse-shooters, Wyvern, to-morrow?’ his brother-earl had asked, when first the visitor arrived.

‘I have not fired a gun for years—except a rifle at some battue in Austria—so the grouse are quite safe from me,’ Lord Wyvern had smilingly replied ; ‘but, if there is to be an expedition, I will accompany the lookers-on willingly enough.’

That the newly-arrived earl rode exceedingly well, even Captain Crasher and Sir Harker Topham, who on such points were hard to please, admitted, while he presently gave proof that with the billiard-cue, as with the pistol, he was more than a match for any there. But he was not in the least vain of these or of other minor accomplishments, and, indeed, seemed to care very little for the trifles

that with most of his present associates made up the real business of life. He read a good deal, and wrote a good deal, and preferred the conversation of such few of the guests as were men of erudition. That he was, and had been now for many years, a childless widower, was known.

‘A happy stroke, wouldn’t it be, for Lady Piminy, if one of those Piminy girls,’ said Captain Crasher, as he knocked the ivory balls about, ‘could become Countess Wyvern Number Two.’

CHAPTER VIII.

AT LAWYER STURT'S.

‘THIS is an awkward business, my man—
an awkward and a disagreeable business,
I may say.’

The speaker was Mr. Sturt, one of the principal solicitors in Daneborough, and clerk to the magistrates—the county magistrates, not the borough dispensers of justice. He was in his office in Priory Lane, a narrow, neat thoroughfare, that conducts from High Street to a grass-grown open space, surrounded by tene-

ments, where once the old priory stood amidst its leafy gardens. Mr. Sturt—better known among the humbler of his fellow-townsmen as Lawyer Sturt—was a dapper little man, with fair hair cropped short, very white hands and wristbands, and a dandified exterior, from his bright boots to his carefully-trained whiskers. He was about the last man in Daneborough whom a stranger would have picked out as a member of the legal profession—not that the law cannot be embraced as a calling without detriment to the cleanest of hands and the most spotless of linen, but that we most of us draw an ideal portrait of a lawyer, which differs a good deal from that of ‘Alexander Sturt, gentleman.’

‘An awkward business for him, I hope!’ growled out the person addressed, with a

fierce malediction following on his words.

‘You mustn’t swear here, my friend!’ authoritatively rejoined the little lawyer, who had a proper horror of all oaths, except such as are associated with the witness-box.

‘No offence, sir,’ answered the red-bearded, slouching fellow who stood, hat in hand, beside the office table, and who was indeed no other than Rufus Crouch; ‘but a man can’t pick his words, as I’ve heard seafaring chaps say, in a gale of wind. And it’s far from being fair weather between Sir Robert Shirley, Baronet, and me. Let him look out for squalls. I’m not the sort to put up with a blow, not I; and he shall pay for it, dear enough.’

‘You persist, then, in your accusation against the gentleman whose name you

have just mentioned?' said Lawyer Sturt. 'Very well. I have sent a message to Dr. Leader. I have no doubt, if he is at home, that he will oblige me by stepping round. No other county magistrate could be so promptly communicated with. You can sit down, if you like, and wait for him. I have papers to attend to.'

Crouch took the chair that was indicated to him, while Mr. Sturt went on with his writing. In perhaps twenty minutes more a boy clerk ushered in 'Dr. Leader.'

'I hoped you would be at home, sir. It was kind of you to come so quickly,' said Mr. Sturt, as he shook hands with Dr. Leader, who was a large, elderly man, with kind, wise eyes, and a head partly bald.

The doctor had been a fashionable phy-

sician for long years in some watering-place, and had then unexpectedly inherited the comfortable property of a distant kinsman, consisting in land close to Daneborough. The doctor, there being a dearth of working magistrates, had been put into the Commission of the Peace, and was supposed to make a very sensible, but also a very merciful, member of the quorum. His house was on the outskirts of the town, and he had readily responded to Lawyer Sturt's appeal. A short preliminary explanation put the doctor-magistrate, skilled in diagnosis, whether of disease or crime, in possession of the principal facts.

‘This man insists,’ said Lawyer Sturt, ‘upon bringing a formal charge against Sir Robert Shirley, of Helston, a landed

gentleman, a baronet, and brother to Lady Thorsdale.' And there was something quite regretful in his tone, as he enumerated the social advantages of the accused person.

'Ah, indeed!' said Dr. Leader, seating himself in a leathern arm-chair, and surveying from beneath his bushy grey eyebrows the truculent countenance, shaggy red beard, rolling, restless eyes, and broad form of the accuser.

'And,' added the clerk to the magistrates, 'he admits that it is private resentment which has induced him to come forward in this matter.'

'Nothing more probable,' tolerantly observed the doctor, who perhaps remembered the proverb about thieves falling out with good results. 'We had

better get in a succinct form his statement of the case, and reduce it to writing. Then we shall see our way.'

'He gave me these, Sir R. did,' said Crouch, savagely, as with a brown forefinger he pointed to two bluish wheals that scarred his ugly face, 'as if I'd been a hound, to bear the whip. And, but for a conceited young no-man's-son who came up, I'd——' But here Crouch seemed to remember that even a garbled account of the affray in which he had been worsted by Don would not tell in his favour, and, pausing, he said, sullenly, 'I'm not here to jaw about a mere assault. I've been a quill-driver myself, and ought to know something of this kind of thing. I charge Sir Robert Shirley, Baronet, with forgery to the tune of eight hundred pounds sterling. He did it at a time

when he was on bad terms with his father, the late Sir Robert, who was master to my father, long farm-bailiff at Shirley. The forged cheque purported to be signed by a nobleman who lived near us—at Shirley, I mean—and I was the man who presented it, and got the cash for it, at the Threddleston and County Bank at Threddleston. They knew the name of Shirley there, and that of the nobleman who drew the cheque, or was supposed to have done so, even better—anyhow, I touched the tin. Then there came to be a coolness, and there were words between me and Sir R. And that was how he wrote me two letters, which I have by me to this day, and which are proofs that he wrote Lord Wyvern's name on the cheque, and that he begged and prayed me, his accomplice, not to split.'

‘This sounds a cock-and-bull story, my man,’ remarked Lawyer Sturt. ‘I doubt any jury would believe your tale.’

‘That depends, of course,’ said Dr. Leader, mildly, ‘upon the amount of corroborative evidence. The witness—if I may call him so—talked of proofs. If he has them to produce, they would certainly strengthen his case.’

‘I’ve got them, sir; never doubt me!’ responded Crouch, confidently. ‘I can lay my hand at an hour’s notice on what will send my fine gentleman to spoil his white hands with oakum-picking and quarryman’s work.’

Lawyer Sturt bent forward, and in a low voice said something to the doctor-magistrate about ‘frivolous complaints,’ ‘insufficient grounds,’ and so forth.

But Dr. Leader shook his head.

‘There must be no such thing in England, my good sir,’ he said, ‘as a denial of justice. A charge must be heard, and not frowned upon or disregarded. I need hardly say how glad I should be to learn that Sir Robert Shirley—whom I have not seen, though I had a slight acquaintance with the former Sir Robert, his father—— Lord Wyvern happens, curiously enough, to be in this neighbourhood, as you, Mr. Sturt, may probably not be aware. I dined at Lord Thorsdale’s yesterday, and met him there, a visitor in the house.’

Crouch’s eyes sparkled.

‘My lord’s up at Thorsdale, is he? Then, gents, I’m sure he’ll bear me out that he never signed the cheque for that eight hundred. It’s years ago, but that sort of thing is easy to trace out. I saw Sir Richard write the forged signature, in

the "True Blue Hotel" at Threddleston, after a quarrel with his father, which caused him to leave Shirley Hall or be turned out of it. He was short of money, and would have sold his all for cash to pay some play-debts, without doing which he durstn't face his London club again. Four times he tried at Lord Wyvern's signature, with a model before him, and four times he made a mull of the quill-work, but at last he hit it off, and bade me burn the rough copies in the fire—'twas Christmas—and I made believe to do it; but I slipped them into my pocket on the sly, and I have got them still, along with the letters Sir R. wrote me, acknowledging the forgery.'

After this, there could be no doubt as to the propriety of allowing Crouch's sworn information to be taken down with

the customary formalities. Indeed, the clerk to the magistrates had some hesitation as to whether the informer should not be detained in safe custody, since, from his own account of the transaction, he had been an accessory before the crime. But Dr. Leader demurred to this proposal, and Crouch, having signed his affidavit, was allowed to go, promising to return with his documentary evidence on the morrow.

‘A very serious affair,’ said Dr. Leader, as he shook hands, at parting, with Lawyer Sturt.

‘A sad thing for the countess up at Thorsdale—her own brother!’ ejaculated sympathetically the clerk to the county magistrates. It was plain enough that both of them were convinced already of Sir Robert’s guilt.

Meanwhile, Crouch, after indulging for a time in liquor and boastful talk—to both of which he was greatly addicted—at a low public-house on the verge of the town, where he was known, and where he found in the tap-room obsequious listeners, who, for the sake of a possible glass of beer, hearkened with rapt attention to his bragging anecdotes of Australian life, left Daneborough, flushed with drink, and in a state of high excitement. The fact that he had actually begun to do an injury, probably irreparable, to Sir Robert Shirley was so pleasing to his unamiable nature that it was not until he had threaded the straggling length of Limekiln Lane, and had begun to scale the steep path that leads to Beacon Hill, and thence, by way of Hordle Cliff, to Beckdale and Woodburn, that he remembered the

possible consequences to himself of his late denunciation of the detested baronet.

‘I shall be Queen’s evidence, and so come safe out of the forgery job,’ he muttered to himself; ‘but I can’t keep it dark that I was the bolting clerk of old Lawyer Bowman. And, besides the papers, there was the cash-box.’

He knew enough of law to be aware that the crown cannot hold an informer harmless as to the penalty due to other offences than the one for which he has bought a pardon by a betrayal.

‘But if I *am* lagged,’ said Crouch, through his red beard, with a malignant grin, ‘I shall bear it better than Sir R. will. I’d give a hundred guineas, I would, to see him under the scissors of the prison barber. And then there’s the gaol

discipline, the floor-scrubbing, the polishing up of every bit of metal, the diet, and the warders, whose word is always taken against that of a prisoner. Yes, Sir Robert Shirley, Baronet, will have good reason to repent the day when he laid his whip across my face—the face of a better man than ever he was. Once, at Shirley, he gave me a rough rap with his fist, and I laughed, and pretended to take it as a joke, but that was because he was the old master's heir, and I was only the bailiff's son. We recollect old grudges, some of us; and if it hadn't been for that upstart Don——'

And then—so illogical and inconsistent are the trains of thought in an ill-regulated mind—Rufus, by the time he had gained the steep summit of Beacon Hill, whence once tar-barrels and fagots in a blaze had

given notice that Spanish frigates were in sight, and Her Highness Elizabeth unsafe on her throne, was regretting the safe, snug plot for Don's destruction. It would have been a pleasant, profitable task; but Sir Robert's petulance had spoiled all. It was a pity. So easy, Crouch thought, to lure the destined victim, by the aid of false message, to the perilous path at the edge of Hordle Cliff, and then to send him, with a sudden push, to be food for fishes below. It was a bit of cruel treachery, delicious to the ex-gold-digger's envious mind. And, so thinking, he quite regretted his estrangement from Sir Robert Shirley and the breakdown of the conspiracy, as he reached Hordle Cliff.

Hordle Cliff, as Rufus had truly said in his conversation with the baronet, is a

formidable place—a mighty rampart frowning down upon the sea. Six hundred feet of rock—sea-birds wheeling and shrieking below, sharp stony ridges, alternating with pools, shingle-banks, and stretches of yellow sand, or the beach that the beetling path in places actually overhung, honeycombed as the sand-stone rock has gradually become by the sapping touch of age and weather.

Crouch, excited by drink and the tension of his nerves, walked recklessly at the very verge of the giddy height, kicking over now and then a pebble or a clod of earth, and then laughing, as an ogre might have done, at the grim visions that passed through his seething brain.

At last Rufus reached the tempting spot which he had lovingly described to

Sir Robert—the scene of the intended murder. How he had gloated over the details of the projected crime ! It would never be done now—that dark deed—never ! never ! Crouch was not one to risk his neck gratis ; and yet——

At the selected spot the ruffian turned, with his face towards Daneborough, the town he had just left, and by an effort of the imagination saw before him, hurrying along and unsuspecting, the hated form of Don.

‘Aha ! my gentleman foundling !’ he snarled—‘One good push, and over you go, never, never to come up again !’

And as he spoke he stamped his heavy foot on the beetling cliff, and threw forward his great hands in hideous imitation of the purposed crime. But then the crumbling path gave way beneath his un-

wary feet, and with one wild yell of despairing anguish, down, down went Rufus himself to the jagged rocks below !

It was two days before the body was found.

CHAPTER IX.

A BROKEN APPOINTMENT.

IN August, as the almanac informs us, and as some of us know by experience, the sun still rises early, and the days are yet long. The day that succeeded Crouch's denunciation of Sir Robert Shirley at the office of the clerk to the magistrates for that riding of the county of York was a very long day for Dr. Leader. It was also a very uneasy day for Lawyer Sturt. But there was a difference between the feelings of the two. Lawyer Sturt ought

not, according to the fitness of things, to have been a lawyer at all. He was a brisk little man, who might have been a pushing commercial traveller, or, possibly, promoter of a newly-inflated city company, for the doing of, say, anything, for next to nothing, and with several hundred thousand pounds of capital. But he had not a lawyer-like intellect. To punish poor rogues, to repress vagrancy, poaching, window-breaking, and rick-firing, seemed to him the Alpha and the Omega of the duties of a rural magistracy. Of course, he did not wish an aristocratic culprit to go scot-free. Of course, he thought that a baronet who had forged a lord's name on a cheque ought to suffer for his misdeeds. But he was annoyed that the untoward affair should have come to light within his own circuit; wishing, very

naturally, to make things pleasant for, and to stand well with, the great ones of the earth.

Dr. Leader's mental constitution was more finely strung than that of Mr. Sturt. He, too, was sorry that disgrace should come, in a sidelong way, to the noble name of Thorsdale. The earl had been hospitable to him, and civil too, for Dr. Leader was a man to be respected. But not for a moment did he think of screening the earl's brother-in-law from merited punishment. The only question was, whether there were real grounds to go upon. Dr. Leader, judging by Crouch's demeanour on the previous day, and by the coherence of his tale, thought that such grounds did exist. So, too, did Lawyer Sturt. But then, minds are so differently constituted as regards the reception

of evidence. Some resist it as a slate roof resists the rain. You may prove, but they, perversely, remain deaf and blind and non-absorbent. Others swallow your proofs, but reluctantly, and with an ill grace, as a child takes nauseous physic. So it was with Lawyer Sturt. But it was far otherwise with the medical magistrate. No justice of the peace in his division of the great county of Yorkshire was so gentle, so discriminating, it was said, as Dr. Leader, the ex-physician; but none the less did he feel that right must be done.

Rufus Crouch had fixed an hour for his second visit, backed up with documentary proofs, to Lawyer Sturt's office. At noon he had promised to be there. Dr. Leader came duly before the clock on the red-brick front of Daneborough Town-Hall.

doled out the sharp strokes of twelve. But Crouch did not come at twelve. The magistrate waited; the clerk waited. It was ten minutes to one when they gave up the idea that the Australian gold-digger would be, if not exact, at least approximatively punctual to the appointment which he had made.

About two o'clock, after luncheon-time, Dr. Leader returned. Two struck; still no sign of Crouch. And yet, but yesterday, the man had seemed so intent upon his purpose, so bitterly in earnest, that both magistrate and clerk felt sure that Crouch's promise had been made in all sincerity.

'The fellow has been drinking, I daresay, and has slept till late,' suggested Lawyer Sturt.

But Dr. Leader shook his head.

‘The man drinks,’ he said, ‘as we could both of us observe yesterday, but he is a seasoned vessel, and even in his cups would scarcely rest while his brain was on fire with revengeful purpose. He has, too, as my old habit of observation enabled me to remark, a constitution of extraordinary vigour, and it would take much to stupefy him. There is something odd about his non-appearance.’

‘Perhaps the rogue has changed his mind?’ hinted Lawyer Sturt, contemptuously. He did not like those who spoke evil of dignities, and would have smirked delightedly at finding out the rough accuser of so distinguished a gentleman as the master of Shirley to be a mere libeller.

‘I fear,’ replied Dr. Leader, with his quiet smile, ‘the man’s mind was made up

—terribly made up—and was proof against change. A rogue he is, self-convicted, but very positive, and very real. I will sit here with you, if you please, Mr. Sturt, for awhile, so as to be here if our lagging witness should drop in.'

Three o'clock, four o'clock, and still no Crouch. Lawyer Sturt was uneasy, and the magistrate thoughtful.

'We must give the fellow up,' said Mr. Sturt, as the hands of the office-clock indicated a quarter-to-five.

'I think, with you, that the appointment will not now be kept,' said Dr. Leader, gravely; 'but that the man meant to keep it I am convinced. If he does not give any sign of life, it will be our duty to seek him out.'

'You think so, doctor?' returned Lawyer Sturt, unwillingly.

‘I am certain of it,’ answered the magistrate, firmly. ‘This case is by far too important a one to be trifled with or burked.’

And then Lawyer Sturt, adjusting his blond whiskers, and remembering the newspapers and their pungent comments on the shortcomings of those who assist Themis, with her sword and scales and bandaged eyes, ruefully coincided with the doctor.

At half-past five o’clock, Superintendent Whistler, of the county constabulary, was in Dr. Leader’s cool dining-room, which overlooked the lawn and the flowers and the rook-haunted elms of the garden, to receive the magistrate’s orders. A tall, lean man was the policeman-in-chief, and in aspect very unlike his fleshy compeer, Superintendent Swann of Daneborough.

He had been a dragoon, and held himself upright, in military fashion, ready to obey orders.

‘A bad lot, sir, that Crouch, from the little I’ve seen and the much I’ve heard of him,’ said the superintendent, peering grimly at the imaginary impersonation of the man of whom he spoke. ‘Jet-hunters, generally, are a very decent set. But this fellow is a disgrace to any decent set. He lives all alone on the moors as a trespasser, or a squatter, as they call it, on Lord Thorsdale’s land. But, such as he is, I’ll bring him to you, sir, if I can find him.’

‘It is possible that the man may have got himself into trouble in some tavern brawl, which would account for his failure to keep his appointment with Mr. Sturt and myself,’ said Dr. Leader, thoughtfully.

‘He seemed to me, from what I saw of him, to be both of a boastful and quarrelsome disposition.’

‘That’s a true bill, sir,’ said the superintendent, assentingly. ‘The chap has been in the thick of more rows at fair and market than any bad character of these parts. It’s as likely as not that he has been in liquor, and fighting or doing damage to property, and so got himself locked up for disorderly conduct. I’ll inquire about him at the borough police-station before I go up the hillside.’

Having said this, Superintendent Whistler saluted and withdrew. Dr. Leader remained behind, musing over the strange revelation which Crouch had made, and on its probable results.

An English magistrate differs very much from a French one, in that his duties are

strictly, for the most part, judicial. He sits to try cases, but he seldom occupies himself in hunting up cases for trial. All that restless activity which French procureurs and substitutes and judges of instruction display in ferreting out hidden crime, is left in England to the police, and that novel institution, the Public Prosecutor. But none the less did the medical magistrate feel that it was incumbent on him to do his duty in this matter, even although it might be uncongenial to his nature and his habits.

The August day burned itself out at last with a red sunset, like the embers of a dying fire ; and Dr. Leader, who was a bachelor and dined late, had finished his solitary meal, and was sitting alone and thoughtfully sipping his claret, when the police-officer returned.

‘I’m afraid, sir, I’ve not much that is satisfactory to report,’ said Superintendent Whistler, with rather a crestfallen air, ‘since I have not succeeded in getting speech of the party. A long walk it is, and a wildish one, to the chap’s lonely little place among the high moors, where, if a fog came on, there is always a chance of floundering into some bog that it’s not so easy to get out of again. And the house, or hut—for it’s a shame to call the tumble-down shanty a regular house—is hard to find. Most of Crouch’s neighbours seem to be mortally afraid of “old Robinson Crusoe,” as they call him behind his back, with his savage temper, and his dogs, and his gun; and when I got a boy to guide me, he wouldn’t come a step further once we sighted the roof, for fear, as he said, “old Crusoe” should raddle his

bones for bringing the bobbies upon him. A nice name he's got in the country, that Crouch.'

'I gather, from what you tell me, superintendent,' said the doctor, 'that you were refused admittance, or that you found the bird had flown.'

'I found the hut, sir,' answered the superintendent, 'fastened up more strongly than you'd believe likely in such a miserable place, for I pushed the door hard, besides knocking and calling loud enough to wake the dead. But I got no sort of answer, nothing but the barking and howling of the dogs—the fellow keeps a lot of 'em, chained up outside—and they, I reckon, poor brutes, were more hungry than fierce, for they were as gaunt as greyhounds, and whined when I went away, as if they had hoped I'd brought them food,

and were nigh clemmed' (starved) 'for the want of victuals. I dropped in, on my way back, for a second time at the borough police-station, sir, in Daneborough here; but my brother-officer, Superintendent Swann, could only tell me that Crouch had not been run in for any offence, and that no constable had set eyes on him lately.'

'You have had a long walk, and a fruitless one, Mr. Whistler,' said the doctor, considerately filling a large glass, which the chief officer of county constabulary emptied with great satisfaction; 'and I need not to-night trouble you any further on this subject. The man's absence may, after all, have been caused by some unexpected circumstance, and he may have honestly meant to keep tryst, and have been prevented from doing so. I shall see

Mr. Sturt again about this matter, and will send word round to the station when I require the assistance of the police.'

'Good-night, then, sir; yours to command,' said the superintendent, as he stiffly made his martial salute, and retired.

Dr. Leader sat for some time in deep thought.

'The man meant to come,' he said to himself. 'Something must have caused him to change his purpose. I wonder if his captain, that old Obadiah Jedson, the jet-hunter, knows what it is. If Crouch delays much longer, I must try to find him through that channel.'

CHAPTER X.

‘I OWN I WAS WRONG.’

ON the day on which the medical magistrate waited in vain for the reappearance of the accuser of Sir Robert Shirley, Don called at the parsonage of Woodburn. He had been a frequent visitor there, when he wore his sailor's garb, or the red woollen shirt and rough clothes of the jet-hunter, and came to study under the auspices of kind, learned Mr. Langton.

He was now in the usual attire of a gentleman, but there was a sadness in his

bright young face that only dated from the day when his hopes of Violet for his wife had been rudely dashed away.

‘Is Mr. Marsh at home?’ Don asked.

Servants know most things. The very housemaid of whom Don asked the question knew all about the engagement and the guardian’s harshness, and hated Mr. Marsh for his cruelty in ‘coming between young loving hearts like theirs—she a sweet young lady, and he so like a lord,’ as the housemaid had often remarked to her fellow-servants over the social teacup.

Mr. Marsh, when he came into the drawing-room of the parsonage, and found Don standing there alone, was moved by a generous impulse.

‘I have to beg your pardon, Mr. Don,’ he said, heartily; ‘and, as an honest man,

I feel it my duty to own that I have done you, unwittingly, a great injustice. Every injurious expression that I used in my anger towards yourself applies, I find, to another person, of whose very existence I was ignorant. I withdraw and regret those words, and—a hard thing for an Englishman to do—I own I was wrong.’

‘Dear sir, you have said enough,’ answered Don, readily. ‘I was certain that you had mistaken my motives, but I felt sure that you acted from a sense of duty. I am glad to hear you speak as you do now.’

‘Then let us shake hands on the strength of it,’ said the London merchant, cordially; and the elderly man and the young one did shake hands frankly enough. Mr. Marsh himself was quite in a glow of self-satisfaction. He had owned himself to have

been in the wrong. He had apologised to a nameless youngster—a mere jet-hunter some weeks since—only a clerk now. He had humbled himself before his junior—no trifling task to as stiff-necked a citizen as any within the London postal district; and he felt the more kindly towards Don because he had acknowledged his former injustice towards the gallant lad.

‘ But, Mr. Don,’ remarked the drysalter presently, shaking his head, and assuming his most serious aspect, ‘ though Ephraim Marsh regards you as a fine young fellow, Miss Violet Mowbray’s guardian must not sanction any betrothal—any love-passages—between his ward and a young man whose worldly position is so unequal to her own. She is a high-born young lady, and I, plain city man as I am, cannot forget that fact. Her parents were proud people, in their

quiet way. Pedigree is not what it was ; but when there are high connections, and money too, Mr. Don——’

‘I understand you, sir,’ said Don, sadly, as the merchant hesitated ; ‘but, believe me, I did not need fresh proofs of the hopelessness of my suit. I am here to-day to ask your permission to my seeing Miss Mowbray once more—only once—before I leave England.’

‘Leave England!’ exclaimed Mr. Marsh.

‘Yes, sir,’ Don explained. ‘It is for Miss Mowbray’s—for Violet’s—dear sake that I have made up my mind to seek a short cut to fortune. Mr. Bartlett, Lord Thorsdale’s land-agent, has kindly recommended me to a brother of his, who is manager of a great estate and of some rich silver-mines in Mexico. The property, a very valuable one, is in a wild part of the

country, in Chihuahua, and belongs to a wealthy Mexican, who lives in Paris, and spends his revenues there. An assistant-engineer and, in fact, assistant-manager is wanted. Mr. Bartlett’s recommendation makes me sure of the post, and in a fortnight I am to sail.’

‘My young friend,’ said Mr. Marsh, very seriously, ‘do you know what Mexico is—I have business relations with the country—and especially what Chihuahua and such states, exposed to the inroads of the savages, are? Upon my word, if you value your scalp, you should re-consider the matter.’

Don smiled with his usual fearless modesty.

‘I *have* considered it, sir,’ he said. ‘One cannot gather fruit from a high tree without the risk of the climb. I, too, have heard and read something as to

Mexico. Mr. Bartlett's brother makes no mystery of the lawless condition of the country. My predecessor, it seems, was killed by Indians. "Send me a dare-devil," he writes, "but let him have cool brains and common-sense, as well as courage, and he may live to be a rich man among us, and retire on his savings. There is not only pay to be earned, but a percentage on the profits of the mine." I should not have mentioned the money, sir, nor would it have tempted me, but for Miss Mowbray's sake,' added Don, with a blush. He looked so noble and so brave, standing there, that the drysalter felt an actual pang of regret that it should be necessary to separate such a pair of lovers as Violet and Don.

'Upon my word,' said Mr. Marsh, 'I am sorry! But never mind that now. Mr. Don, if I consent to your request for a parting

interview with my ward, I must stipulate for no pledges and promises, such as, with a sensitive-minded girl like Miss Mowbray, might fetter her for the future. There must be no positive engagement to prevent the young lady from forming future ties.’

There was a proud sadness in Don’s voice as he replied,

‘ My own honour, sir, would forbid me to be married, or even betrothed, to Miss Mowbray, rich and well-connected, unless I had won for myself the advantages of a position in the world, and of a competence. Should I succeed, I will come back to ask for her love and her hand. Till then, I will accept no plight from her. Of that, Mr. Marsh, I can assure you.’

‘ I will, on receipt of this assurance, go to my ward, mention your wish for a meeting with her, and arrange for it to-morrow,

Mr. Don, if, as I doubt not, the young lady be willing,' said the merchant. 'Wait for me, if you please. I shall soon be back.'

Five minutes after Mr. Marsh's departure the door of the room was opened, and 'Lord Wyvern' was announced.

The earl entered. He had ridden over from Thorsdale on one of his noble entertainer's horses, and attended by a mounted groom, to call upon the rector, whom he had known and esteemed long ago in London, in days when the Reverend Samuel Langton had looked forward to be something grander than a rector.

'You are a son, I suppose, of my old friend, Mr. Langton?' said the ex-ambassador, graciously, to Don.

'I am not related to Mr. Langton, my lord. I am merely waiting here on busi-

ness, if I may call it so,’ answered the young man, with a slight bow.

Lord Wyvern seemed to resume his haughty coldness of demeanour. He seated himself, and, without speaking again, awaited the arrival of the clergyman. But from time to time he could not prevent himself from glancing at Don, as the latter stood, in an attitude of unstudied grace, near a window that commanded a view of the sea. Of what did this young man’s dark eyes, his features, and the very turn of his proud head remind the earl? Lord Wyvern almost felt as though he had known Don—or, at least, seen him before; felt as though the sight of the handsome, manly youth awakened in him vague memories, though of what he knew not. Waiting there on business!—an elastic phrase that

may mean anything. No; there was nothing in that to give an inkling of the speaker's social position. A gentleman, surely, as his carriage and his mien, and the very accents of his clear rich voice implied. And yet——Earl Wyvern was not an inquisitive personage, but he in vain consulted his recollections to discover where or when he had seen such a face before.

‘Lord Wyvern, I believe?’ said Mr. Marsh, coming hastily into the room. ‘I must apologise to your lordship for the stupid blunder of the maid who showed you in. Mr. Langton—my niece’s husband—is in his library, I believe, and quite unaware of your visit. If you will wait one moment, my lord. And you, Mr. Don, please to step this way.’

And the drysalter hurried Don out of the room, and so into the hall.

‘I have spoken to Miss Mowbray,’ he said. ‘I have explained to her that you are on the point of leaving England for a distant country, and only wish to see her alone this once, to bid her farewell. And she will see you—poor girl!—at eleven to-morrow, if you will come. But, Mr. Don, I must remind you again that I consider your promise as absolute and binding, not to entangle so young and tender a nature as my ward’s in the meshes of that fatal thing—a hopeless engagement. I may regard that as a settled matter, may I not?’

‘You may, sir,’ said Don, sorrowfully, but firmly. ‘Not only will I not seek, but I will not take, any promise from her whom I love so dearly and so truly. I will leave her free—quite free. And I thank you, Mr. Marsh, for so much of confidence as you are willing to put in me, and for your

granting me leave to see her—it may be for the last time on this side of the grave.’

‘Upon my word!’ exclaimed the drysalter, as he wrung Don’s hand, ‘you are a very fine young fellow, and I should have been thankful for such a son, or for such a son-in-law, for my own part. Take care of yourself—don’t be rash; make a fortune, and come back; but for the moment we must be prudent. Bless me! I am keeping this grand lord waiting for my nephew by marriage all this time, and I had nearly forgotten him.’

Don took his leave and went, while Mr. Marsh made haste to repair to the library, where he apprised the rector of the coming of the noble visitor, who remained alone in the drawing-room of the parsonage. And when Mr. Langton had hurried away to greet his titled guest, the drysalter seated

himself beside the writing-table, and for some moments reflected on his recent interviews with Don and with his ward.

‘Poor lad! poor lad!’ he soliloquised, sadly, and shaking his head, as if in anticipation of coming evil. ‘I wish him luck, I’m sure. But these are not the days of Richard Whittingtons. No, no! And I have heard tales of the worse than lawless land in which he is going to seek his fortune—tales that make me augur ill of a happy ending to this little romance. It is a pity, too!’ he added, in conclusion, with another shake of the head. And then, as if the mention of Mexico suggested the logwood, the indigo, the dragon’s blood, the cochineal, and other materials for dyes which are shipped at Vera Cruz, and Mazatlan, and Belize, and other ports of these remote regions,

the London merchant took up a pen, and speedily absorbed his whole faculties in a letter of instructions to the steady foreman whom he had left in Creek Lane, E.C., to carry on as best he might the old-established business of Crump, Marsh, and Caxton.

CHAPTER XI.

FAREWELL TO VIOLET.

AT the appointed hour on the day succeeding to that on which Lord Wyvern had paid his visit, Don rode into the pretty garden of the parsonage. There was work to be done, his interview with Violet over, on behalf of his present employer. Many a mile of moorland had the young assistant of Mr. Bartlett to scour that day. He was going away: he was going to Mexico, and to a disturbed province, there to take his chance amidst

fierce Indian raiders, fevers, ill-disciplined soldiery, and Mexican banditti. But none the less was he in earnest in fulfilling the duties of his present post to the last. A gallant rider was Don. The steed he rode was a strong, wiry horse, such as befitted the needs of the active subordinates in Lord Thorsdale's land-agent's office, of a dark bay colour—no beauty to look at; but, with Don on his back, the animal carried himself almost as proudly as did Sir Robert's black courser. The young man dismounted, and rang the bell, and, leaving his bridle in the hands of the weeding-boy, went in.

‘I will tell Miss Violet, sir,’ said the maid-servant, who ushered Don into a little side-room, where the rector gave occasional audiences to plumbers, carpenters, and such other useful persons.

Then Don was, after a brief delay, inducted into the drawing-room, where he found Violet Mowbray, looking very pale and pretty, and motherly Mrs. Langton gathering up a heap of unfinished letters and envelopes.

‘Glad to see you, Mr. Don! No, never mind me; I intend to leave you two young people to talk it out.’

Mrs. Langton trotted off, and Don and Violet were left alone together. Violet was the first to speak.

‘So you have made up your mind, Don dear, to go away and leave me?’

Men have been leaving the women they loved and the women that loved them since the world began, by sea and land, on errands of war or of peace, and still—still has arisen the same plaintive cry, ‘You are going to leave me!’ It is sad.

But it is in the nature of things that it should be so. The stay-at-home sex must wait, and hope, and wish, while men face battle and storm, and traverse earth and water. How many a girl said to her lover—before Waterloo, for instance—‘You will soon come back?’ Those tears are dry long ago.

‘I am going, Violet darling,’ answered Don, drawing nearer, ‘that I may come again all the sooner to claim her I love as my wife, to win my sweet prize, and be very happy ever after, as the dear old story-books say. In England, Violet, I should not have had a chance. I am not, I hope, ungrateful. I have found kind friends. Who has more cause to be thankful than I have for kindness on the part of those who were not akin to me—a nameless, lost child, picked up on

the sea-beach by good, half-tutored jet-seekers? But in England, my own, I could never rise as I hope to do—as I shall try to do—quickly. I want to get suddenly rich; then I must go where fortunes are rapidly made.'

'But, Don—Don,' answered Violet, looking at him tearfully, with large eyes wistfully fixed upon his face, 'suppose you never come back to England—never come back to me? Girl as I am, I have read something of the wild country whither you are bound. I know partly what lurking dangers await you there. There is sickness; there is frequent civil war; there are brigands; there are Indians—more terrible still. How, my love, my love!'—she cried out these words with a pitiful accent of sobbing entreaty—'if you never come back to me?'

Don did his best to comfort her.

‘The place,’ he said, cheerfully, ‘is not as black as it is painted. Mr. Bartlett’s brother has been thriving there for years. Chihuahua is a mountainous part of the country, and therefore fairly healthy. It will be a rough life, but I do not care for that; and I hope soon to come to an understanding with my neighbours there, of whatsoever colour their skins may be; and, I believe, we shall have a variety of shades, from black or red to brown and yellow. I must take my chance with the rest. Do not be afraid for me.’

‘It is because you are so dauntless, Don,’ said Violet, looking up with fond pride at the young man’s noble face—‘it is because all the world knows how brave you are, and how you have risked your young life often for others on our York-

shire coast here, that I am afraid for you, who fear nothing. There are cruel savages, there is a treacherous climate; there are perils from earthquake, robbers, and pestilence, where you are going; and yet, if you were not so fearless, my love, I should be less anxious for you. Will you not be careful, Don, for your little Violet's sake ?'

She sobbed here. He took her hands in his; they were cold and trembling. He pressed them to his lips.

'Come, come !' he said, encouragingly. 'We must not make out my future abode a place from which no traveller returns. Mexico is a country in which, I am told, even French shopkeepers and teachers of accomplishments, who come straight from Paris, and have no romantic ideas about them, amass dollars and doubloons, and

come home rich, to buy a village at Auteuil or at Poissy. Mr. Bartlett, who has been there nine years, reckons on coming home in six more with a fortune. I do not want,' added Don, modestly, 'to earn so much, or to stay so long. But stay I must until I can claim my Violet without being thought a needy schemer.'

'I will never, never marry anyone but you, Don!' said the girl, sobbing. 'I am yours, dear, as much as if you had put the ring on this poor little finger of mine; and, till you come back, I shall think of you—dream of you—night and day.'

'Violet love,' said Don, tenderly, but firmly, 'there must be no engagement—no binding troth-plight—between you and me. That much I have promised to Mr. Marsh, your guardian, to whose indulgence I owe it that I am allowed to see you—to

be here alone with you—to-day. There must be no pledge, dearest, to hamper you in the future—nothing to make you think that you are bound to Don, should Don come to be half-forgotten.'

'Cruel! cruel!' was Violet's reproachful answer, as she looked at him, all her soul in her eyes. 'Do you, too, wish to be free to change?'

'I shall never love anyone, never marry anyone, except Violet Mowbray, however long I live!' answered Don, simply; 'but I am merely a nameless young fellow going across the ocean, as thousands of young Englishmen have done, hoping to shear the golden fleece in some El Dorado or another. Had I stayed, our separation must, I fear, have been final. Even when your guardian's authority over your actions shall come to an end, I—I—Don, the jet-

hunter, the foundling—could not bear to have it said of me that I had sought an heiress—for her money.’

‘How I hate that money ! how I wish—’ said Miss Mowbray, almost angrily, and looking about her as if she saw an actual and palpable barrier, erected in the form of heaped-up gold, between her lover and herself. ‘Mr. Marsh is too prejudiced.’

‘I am afraid, love,’ said Don, sadly, ‘that we should find, did we but hear the gossip of others, that his prejudices are largely shared by the world around us. It is reckoned a shame for a man to marry for the sake of gain ; and that blame would have attached itself to me, even had your guardian not felt it his duty to——But, Violet, my sweet, it is hard to say the word. I must go, leaving you unfettered,

untrammelled, by any sort of engagement with such a one as Don.'

'For Don to come and claim me, I would wait,' answered Violet, with a firmness strange in one so mild, 'until my face was wrinkled, and my hair was grey, and I was quite—quite old. You may go out there, Don, alone, but you will take my heart with you to Mexico. So be sure you do not stay too long beyond that weary waste of waters, for Violet's sake.'

Then there followed that question as to correspondence which has occupied and perturbed many pairs of faithful lovers torn apart.

'Your letters, Don,' said Violet, shyly, 'would be such a comfort to me. And I would write very often, and that would be a pleasure to me, too, in my loneliness, for

I should feel as if I were talking to you, dear; and that would be something, though thousands of miles of sea and deserts and sierras would lie between us. You might not have time always, I dare-say, to read my letters—you will be so busy—but I am sure you will be glad to know that your girl that you love at home in England was thinking of you, her darling, far away.'

Don promised that he would write, and write often, if Mr. Marsh's consent could be obtained to such epistolary intercourse between his ward and the self-expatriated exile. He had, personally, doubts as to the guardian's pliability in this respect, but he kept such doubts to himself, just as he omitted to mention the fact that his immediate predecessor in the post he sought had been speared and scalped but a few weeks ago,

by roving Indian warriors of the Apaché tribe.

There was more of fond talk, the little, sacred reminiscences, the lovers' prattle, that all can remember, that seem so sweet and precious, and which, if transferred to prosaic print and paper, would lose all their charm. And then came the bitter, bitter moment of the actual parting, when the sad words, 'Good-bye,' had to be spoken, and the last look exchanged. Perhaps never more on earth were those two loving hearts, so young, so honest, and so true, to beat near to one another. Violet's cold hands were in Don's stronger ones. She looked up at him, as if to take comfort in his courage and his strength, looked in his fair young face as though to treasure up in her memory the recollection of it.

‘My love! my own!’ she murmured.
‘Make haste and come back—to me!’

Then Don caught her in his arms, and kissed her pale soft cheek once and again.

‘Good-bye,’ he said, ‘my love, good-bye—Violet dear!’

The girl was weeping now, weeping piteously, as she clung to him. Gently he disengaged himself from the slender arms that wreathed themselves round his neck, kissed her again, and with one deep sob turned away, and hurried from the room and from the house. He sprang into his saddle, and, without a backward glance towards the parsonage, rode rapidly away.

Don rode away. To love and to ride away has been the lot of many a gallant youth since those old days when ballad rhymesters commemorated the event in

their jingling lines as one of the commonest in the world. Those were the old stirring times of battle and tournament, of pilgrimages that were more fraught with risk and more beset by hardships than a modern campaign, of adventure-seeking, prompted by glory or by gain, as circumstances might dictate, but seldom by any motive more æsthetic.

And here a word as to our remote ancestors, whose long-vanished era seems to us through the dim haze of the past so gorgeous and so graceful. There is a marked difference, however, between our conception of them as a whole, and their own recorded utterances, whenever a knight like Joinville, or a courtier like Chaucer, proved able to handle the pen as well as the sword. They did romantic things, but they never seemed to know

that they were romantic. Half the Crusaders who ruined themselves, health and purse alike, in the long struggle to take and keep Jerusalem, went forth to fight because crusading was the fashion, just as Londoners now scale Alpine peaks or rush to shoot big game in the Rocky Mountains. The rebel of to-day expected his slice of the forfeited lands of the opposite party, when once he should have set upon the throne a king of his own choosing.

Don was of a nobler mould than the average of the knights and squires, pages and men-at-arms, of whom we see the picturesque shadows flit across the magic mirror of imagination. He was bound, it was true, for the El Dorado of the companions of Columbus, but it was to do honest work for which the world would be better. Whereas the chivalrous gentle-

men whom Spain sent forth to the New World could dream of nothing better than deep silver-mines full of natives working under the lash and worse tortures still; and, beneath the glaring sun, plantations where spice and sugar and tobacco were produced under similar philanthropic conditions for the Cadiz market. Don, at any rate, was not going to rob and rifle Caciques for their gold, nor to depopulate districts in the effort to get at hidden treasure. His was to be a fair stand-up struggle with wild nature and ferocious foes. The danger was great, but the toil was honourable.

As Don returned from his visit to the parsonage, his heart swelled high within him, sad as it was, and sad as it is always to a young man, who loves as he loved, to be banished from the dear one's side. But

for the fact that he must leave Violet Mowbray, there was little in the mere circumstance that he was about to quit his native land to depress him. That 'patriotism of the church belfry,' that cat-like local attachment which debars the Frenchman from emigrating, and acts, more or less, on the inhabitants of almost every Continental country, is very slightly felt among us roving English, seldom born without a dash of the old Norse spirit to quicken us for the conquest of seas. It is not that we love our country less than the sentimental Gaul loves his. There are Englishmen parching in the hot winds of Upper India, or slaving beneath the Austral sun, who have nightly dreams of the daisies, and orchards, and honeysuckle hedges of Hereford or Cheshire, that they may never see again, and who speak

cheerily for years, of 'going home one of these days.' It is always 'home,' with an exile. It was 'home' with the estranged American colonist before the great Day of Independence dawned. George Washington never could get rid of the notion that the England he had seen, and against whose generals and grenadiers he had to put his wits and muster his raw militia, was in reality his home, though his interest lay on the banks of the Potomac instead of the Thames, and though the accident of birth had made him a Virginian.

There was not much, save his love for Violet, and the charm of her society, on the rare occasions of their meeting, to detain Don in Yorkshire or in England. He had done with his old life, and was a jet-hunter no more. Somehow, that had

been settled for him. When first he had accepted the offers of the earl's land-agent, and had become one of the salaried staff who superintended the vast Thorsdale property, he had felt that he should go back to the sands and the rough companionship and the drudgery of a jet-seeker's life no more. He had talked faintly, at first, of such a resumption of his early habits; but presently he recognised the truth that, the start once made, his progress must be an upward one. The jet-hunter's career, after all, was not one fitted for an educated man, any more than is that of a gipsy. And Don was educated, while his intellect was not clouded and confused, as was that of his gaunt old captain, by the mystic visions of a seer. His present position at Thorsdale, though comfortable and creditable, was not one which

would afford him any hope of speedily renewing his suit for Violet's hand. But, in the wild land whither he was bound, sudden changes of fortune were not unusual. He had read much—for his taste for reading was, like that of most clever lads, omnivorous—of Mexican mines, and knew of recorded instances in which hazard or research, by a single stroke of the pick, had multiplied ten-fold—nay, fifty-fold—the net revenue of such a property. Mining, undirected by science and technical skill, is little better than a system of haphazard gambling, or of plodding routine; and there is no department of human industry in which intelligence produces better fruits.

Don had his own ideas. He would learn and listen, hear much and say little, but all the time he would keep his eyes open for

amateur prospecting, and, unless an Apaché tomahawk should put an end to his explorings, he hoped to be back at Violet's side without any very tedious delay.

There were preparations to be made, of course, but they were few, and would soon be completed. It was necessary to bid farewell to old friends and comrades, to Obadiah Jedson, and Don's former nurse, the good Keziah, above all, but what remained to be done was but trifling. We do not prepare ourselves as our fathers did in the days when an outfit for India meant three camel-loads of cumbrous trunks, and exacted huge outlay and enormous trouble before sailing. Don's baggage would be, as was natural, considering the state of his finances, of a less ponderous nature. An assistant engineer in an out-lying province of Mexico seldom

needs to wear anything save the slop suit and Garibaldian red shirt, the poncho that protects him from tropical rains or mountain blasts, and the belt and sombrero that complete his costume. He was going out to work, and had occasion for little which was not adapted to a rougher life, in some respects, than even he, the foundling of the sea-beach, had ever known.

At the land-office Don found himself an object of envy and admiration to the kindly, puzzle-witted youngster, whom he was wont to pilot at times through the mysteries of complicated arithmetic; while the superannuated old head-clerk contemplated him as a lunatic who was about to give up safety and a snug salary to take his chance amidst yellow-fever, malignant Mexicans, and remorseless savages. The estate-agent himself was of a different .

opinion. There were times, indeed, when he felt as if he could never forgive himself if, in compliance with his brother's request for a recruit, he should prove to have sent out Don to meet his death by the arrow of the Indian or by the sword of the pestilence; but then he comforted himself by the conviction that that brave, bright young fellow was just the lad to come scatheless out of such an ordeal as that which lay before him.

‘At any rate,’ he muttered, as he drove his gig back to Daneborough, ‘it’s done now, and can’t be undone. And I’m sure it’s for the best.’

CHAPTER XII.

UNDER THE HEARTHSTONE.

‘WE are striking work here, sir. We are going south; but that matters little. As for Rufus Crouch, we have not had him among us these four days past. And that, doctor, is all I have to tell.’

Obadiah Jedson, as he said these words, leaning on the long, sharp-pointed shovel which jet-hunters use, looked sternly and grandly picturesque, his grey locks streaming over his shoulders, and his tall, gaunt height towering aloft.

It was a picturesque scene altogether. There, in a corner of the beach, rock-sheltered, were grouped the jet-hunters, male and female, some with tools in their hands, others with bundles and boxes and cooking utensils, as if making ready for a march; while in the background stood Superintendent Whistler, of the county police, in command of what is technically known as a 'half rank' of four helmeted constables. The medical magistrate was at the head of the party.

'This person Crouch,' Dr. Leader was in the act of saying, when suddenly a procession of seafaring men came winding its way along the beach skirting the cliff-wall, and in the midst of the marching column was visible a rude litter, composed of a tarpaulin upheld by crossed oars and boat-hooks, and upon which lay

a shapeless, motionless something, covered up decorously with another fragment of tarpaulin.

‘An accident, do you say? Let me see it,’ said Dr. Leader, dropping the magistrate and resuming his old functions as a medical man, as the men advanced, bearing their helpless burden.

The tarpaulin, when removed, gave to view the marble-white face and pinched features of a dead man. There was no mistaking the shaggy red beard, the fell of coarse hair, the broad, strongly-built figure of Rufus Crouch.

There he lay, the strong man, whose strength had rarely been used save for purposes selfish or evil, the defaulting clerk, the gold-digger, the bush-ranger probably, of that far Austral clime which he had never ceased to regret, the grim

hermit of the moorland waste. Rufus Crouch had never cared to earn a gentle thought or a good word from his fellow-workers. He had lived and died unloved. Yet the jet-seekers clustered around, and the women's shrill voices were uplifted pityingly, and the men muttered, 'Poor chap!' because the senseless form on which they looked was that of a man, and death and suffering are common to us all.

Those who bore the corpse were not fishermen; nor were they sailors of the Preventive Service, three or four of whom were to be seen amongst the followers in their navy-blue, with brass-hilted cutlasses clinking as they walked, and burnished telescopes tucked under their brawny arms. The actual bearers, who had discovered the body on the beach, and

seemed proud of their discovery, were workmen who had been sent to repair a breakwater underneath Hordle Cliff, and who had found Crouch there, dead, and with every appearance of having been dead for a long time, among the sharp rocks, with heaps of crumbled rubbish near him, that had fallen with him when the treacherous cliff-path had given way beneath his careless feet, and hurled him headlong down the giddy precipice.

‘Yes, he must have been dead for days—the tide had reached the place where he lay, for here is the green slime of the seaweed mingling with his hair and staining his clothes,’ said Dr. Leader, after a brief inspection of the inanimate figure before him. ‘A coroner’s inquest, of course, will have to be held; but the facts are so clear that the inquiry and

the verdict will be mere formalities. He was on his way back from Daneborough towards Beckdale, when the path gave way, and he fell. No human being could have survived that fall.'

Then came the question as to the disposal of the body. Inquests are often held, and the remains of those on whom they are to be held are often kept at public-houses, to the great emolument of the beer-sellers. But in this case all deferred to the magistrate, and Dr. Leader promptly decided that it would be better to remove what had lately been Rufus Crouch to his own miserable home, the rather that he, in his magisterial capacity, felt it his duty to institute a search for the documents which the ex-gold-digger had pledged himself to produce at Lawyer Sturt's office, in confirmation of the heavy

charge which he had so vehemently brought against Sir Robert Shirley.

The crowd consented willingly enough to the extra toil which the long upland walk entailed. The bearers, in their white working-clothes, had constant offers made to them on the part of the blue-jackets who formed the bulk of the procession to be relieved of their task; but they declined all proffers of assistance, and resolutely plodded on, with their ghastly burden veiled by the decorous tarpaulin, evidently full of importance, and determined on no account to lose the dignity which rightly belonged to them in their double capacity of the first finders and the consistent supporters of their helpless load.

The straggling train of spectators, urged on by curiosity, and swelled ever and anon

by volunteer recruits from farm or cottage, wound slowly up the bleak hill-side. First went a dozen or so of sturdy beach-men, in their blue garb and tight-fitting jerseys and sou'-wester hats; then trudged the slop-clad workmen who were the central figures of the pageant, carrying the litter; and next followed the rest of the sight-seers, the helmeted police and the magistrate forming the rear-guard.

The report spread through the thinly-peopled upland region as fast as ill news proverbially does fly, that 'Old Robinson Crusoe' had been killed, and was being brought back to the hut that he could never leave again, save for the short journey to the nearest churchyard; and at gaps in the hedge, or at the corners of lanes, stood men and women, lads and children, greedy for a peep at the curi-

osity that was being borne along under the screen of tarpaulin, and hungry for details of the catastrophe.

At last the lonely hut was in view. There it was in its stony ravine, shut in by the barren hills, and standing ugly and solitary—as uninviting a dwelling as any within the compass of the four seas. There was now no furious baying on the part of the four-footed sentinels that guarded the door. The starving dogs could bark no more. Hunger had tamed them, and as they lay exhausted, with haggard eyes, even their complaining howl had died away into a feeble whine of supplication.

‘Poor brutes! it goes to one’s heart somehow to see creatures clemming’ (starving) ‘that way!’ exclaimed several voices, as half-a-dozen of the foremost bustled up

to unhitch the chains or unbuckle the collars of the gaunt animals.

Then, by Dr. Leader's orders, the door was forced open. Slowly, and, as it were, reluctantly, the creaking bolt of the large lock gave way, and an entrance was effected, so that the bearers could come in. They laid the body of Rufus Crouch reverently enough—for there is a majesty in death that for the time invests the meanest and the most uncouth with a sort of sanctity—on the wretched pallet-bed.

The gaping throng without crowded into the hut at the first, elbowing and pushing, until standing-room was scarce; but at a hint from Dr. Leader, the superintendent of police, and Obadiah Jedson, whose moral influence was fully equal to the authority of military Mr. Whistler,

the interior of the miserable dwelling was cleared of inquisitive intruders.

‘And now for our search,’ said Dr. Leader; and the superintendent and the more intelligent of his helmeted acolytes did their best, but on no shelf, and in no locker, chest, basket, barrel, or cupboard, could the most vigilant scrutiny discern anything answering to the papers which Rufus had promised so confidently to produce as proofs of the truth of his accusation against the baronet. There were some clothes, a few books, the stoneware jar of gin half empty, tobacco, fuel, a sack of potatoes, some chemicals, and certain scraps of food, relics of Crouch’s last meal, which were tossed out to the famished dogs; but no documents of any sort.

Under some flour in a nearly empty meal-tub were found twenty-nine sovereigns, all from the Mint of Australia, two five-pound notes, crumpled and dirty, and folded tightly up, and a number of silver and copper coins. This, probably, was the dead man's only treasury, for no other money was visible anywhere. Over the cold fireplace hung from its hooks the gun with which the ruffianly anchorite of this strange retreat had often menaced those who dared to pry into his habits. There was a bowie-knife, and there was a revolver, loaded, in a locked drawer. There were even some spangles and grains of gold-dust discovered in a folded piece of paper ; and that was all.

‘I am very much afraid,’ said the magistrate, as the tedious work of searching into all manner of receptacles, nooks, and

corners came to an end, 'that the man had some other hiding-place away from his hut, or that he had bestowed the documents in safe keeping elsewhere. At any rate, it seems as though we had our trouble for nothing.'

Superintendent Whistler, removing his helmet and wiping his heated brow, thought so too.

But Obadiah tapped his forehead suddenly, as if a new idea had occurred to him.

'I remember,' he said, 'yes, I remember how I once came here, and found the hearth-stone up, and Crouch sorely angered and ill at ease because I found him busy with something beneath it that he did his best to hide. If I am not much mistaken, Dr. Leader, you need but to tear up yonder rough-hewn slab of moun-

tain limestone to find beneath it what you seek.'

The hint was eagerly adopted. The very workmen who had found Crouch's body on the razor-edged rocks below the dizzy height of Hordle Cliff were ready, at a word, to use Crouch's own crow-bar and shovel to force up the heavy hearth-stone, and to lay bare what, but for the former visit to the hut which the old captain of jet-hunters had paid, and Obadiah's suddenly awakened recollections, might never have been seen again by mortal eye. Amongst the crowd without, the excitement grew intense, and, although the police kept back those who tried to push their way in at the open door, the unglazed windows were darkened by peering faces.

'A miser, after all!'—'A crockful of

golden guineas!’—‘Always thought he must be rich—a close chap like old Robinson Crusoe!’

Such were some of the comments of the lovers of mystery outside the dead man’s dwelling. But when, with some difficulty, the weighty stone had been lifted from its place, and the cavity which it concealed was exposed, no gold, to the great disappointment of the spectators, was revealed, but only a number of parchments and papers, heedfully wrapped in oilskin to keep them from injury by damp, and of these Dr. Leader at once took possession.

‘Yes, yes,’ said the magistrate, after a cursory inspection of his prize, and addressing himself as much to Obadiah as to Superintendent Whistler, ‘these are the very papers, as far as I can see, which this

poor wretch promised, and, no doubt, intended to bring with him to Mr Sturt's office on the morrow of the day on which—by pure accident, of course—he met his death by a fall from the dangerous cliff. And there seem to be other documents, too, not less valuable to further the ends of justice, which Crouch may or may not have meant to use for a good purpose, but which are brought to light now, thanks chiefly to you, Captain Jedson.'

Then the door was made fast as well as could be roughly effected, awaiting the formal medical examination which precedes a coroner's inquest, and followed by the starving dogs, who willingly crawled along at the heels of their rescuers and future masters, encouraged by kind words and caressing hands, the party wound its way up the inhospitable ravine, and so

along the bleak moorland path, leaving the hut with its ghastly occupant recumbent on the pallet-bed, to silence and solitude. The police, as before, brought up the rear. As the outskirts of Daneborough were reached, Dr. Leader slipped some money into the hands of the workmen, who took it half-reluctantly, as if payment dimmed the glory of their voluntary task, and again thanked Obadiah Jedson.

‘You have done a good deed, captain,’ said the magistrate. ‘We were all at fault, but for you.’ And then they parted.

CHAPTER XIII.

‘I WILL GO.’

EARL WYVERN, for the second time, was a visitor at Woodburn Parsonage. He had called to bid adieu to his friend of other days, the rector. It was a bishop, and not the mere incumbent of a sea-coast living in Yorkshire, that the earl had once expected to take by the hand. Frail lungs and a weakly constitution had served as a clog on the upward progress of Langton ; but still, failure as he had been from a worldly point of view, Lord Wyvern was

sorry for him: the more so, perhaps, because of the private sorrows of his own earlier life.

‘I leave Thorsdale to-morrow,’ the earl had said. ‘I have promised to stay a week or so with a very old friend, Sir William Herrick, of Herrick Hall, near Shrapton, some thirty miles to the southward, and then, after a few days at Wyvern, I shall probably go abroad again—I scarcely know where.’

Mr. Langton—who knew that Wyvern Castle was one of the grandest of English castellated mansions, overlooking the Severn, and surrounded by stately timber and an ancient park—may, on his side, have pitied the master of such a home, who could not find contentment there, but was going abroad, he knew not whither.

At that moment Dr. Leader was announced. The medical magistrate was a man whom all liked well, and the rector and the earl, who had made his acquaintance at Thorsdale Park, shook hands with him cordially.

Dr. Leader looked around him. All the inmates of the parsonage, including Mr. Marsh, were present. Worthy Mrs. Langton was there. So was Violet Mowbray, looking very sweet, sad, and gentle. The earl, who had known her mother in days long past, was struck by the likeness which she presented to Mrs. Mowbray.

‘My visit to-day,’ said Dr. Leader, with his grave kind smile, which had been welcome beside many a sick-bed, ‘is partly to this young lady’—and here he bowed to Violet, who looked at him with astonished eyes, while a faint tinge of colour rose to

her cheeks—‘on account of a remarkable discovery which, in my capacity of magistrate, I have been fortunate enough to make. I am the bearer of unexpected good news, since here is a deed’—and he produced a thick folded parchment—‘by virtue of which General Oliver Yorke, years and years ago, made over to three trustees the sum of seventy thousand pounds Consols for the benefit of his grand-niece, Violet Mowbray, whom I take to be as clearly entitled to a beneficial interest in this great sum and the back dividends as you are, Mr. Langton, to your parochial tithes.’

Then followed an animated conversation, largely leavened with exclamations of wonder, chiefly on the part of excellent Mrs. Langton. The doctor briefly narrated the salient features of the finding of the

precious document, while Mr. Marsh, on examination, vouched for the genuineness of the signature of the old Indian general long dead, and said what he knew as to the status of the three highly respectable trustees named in the deed.

‘This must have been stolen,’ said the drysalter.

The medical magistrate had no doubt of that. Papers and memoranda had been found proving Rufus Crouch to have been head clerk at a West-country solicitor’s, one Lawyer Bowman, whose name chanced to be familiar to Lord Wyvern.

‘I knew him perfectly,’ said the earl. ‘He acted for my father, as well as for old Sir Robert Shirley, father of the present baronet, and I have heard that before he died, with very enfeebled faculties, and almost complete loss of memory, a rascally

clerk had robbed him and absconded. Probably the gentlemen named in the trust-deed were quite unconscious that the necessary formalities had ever been completed, and that this large sum of money stood in their names in the books of the Bank of England. It was a singular coincidence, too, that General Yorke, whom I have dined with when I was known as Lord Ludlow, and was myself young, should not have survived the signing of this deed by a month.’

‘Three weeks at most, if I remember rightly,’ said Mr. Marsh, who piqued himself on the accuracy of his retentive memory.

‘At any rate,’ rejoined the earl, ‘we may congratulate Miss Mowbray on her good fortune.’

Violet could not repress a sob. The

money brought no comfort to her : it was the golden bar to keep her and Don apart.

‘But,’ said Dr. Leader, seriously, ‘my duty as a magistrate is not yet discharged. I have another errand of a more painful nature. I intended, my lord, to have gone up to Thorsdale; but, finding your lordship here, I must request the favour of a few minutes’ private conversation.’

Inducted by the wondering rector into the comfortable dining-room of the parsonage, Dr. Leader made haste to lay before the earl the proofs of Sir Robert Shirley’s guilt. There was a copy of Crouch’s sworn deposition at Lawyer Sturt’s office. There were—found beneath the hearthstone in the dead man’s miserable hut—Sir Robert’s treasured letters, penned at Shirley, to conciliate the good-

will of his offended plebeian accomplice. There were also the rough copies of the forged cheque for five hundred pounds, the imitation of Lord Wyvern's signature having in each instance been deemed too faulty to pass muster at the Threddleston and County Bank. Never was more convincing documentary evidence brought together.

‘I am sorry for this,’ said the earl, thoughtfully, as he passed his hand across his brow.

‘So am I, Lord Wyvern,’ returned the medical magistrate; ‘and, indeed, it *is* a pity. This wretched man, being highly educated and of fair ability, will suffer more when he comes to pay the penalty of his offence than is the case with vulgar criminals. The very shame of his exposure will double the weight of the severest

sentence that may be passed upon him. But justice must be done.'

For a few moments the earl remained silent.

'I thank you, Dr. Leader,' he said at last, 'for the delicacy and kind feeling with which you have acted in this distressing affair. If you will allow me, I should like to have a few days to reflect. I will write to you, certainly, but I should prefer a short delay.'

To this reasonable request Dr. Leader acceded, and with renewed expressions on the part of Lord Wyvern of his sense of obligation and the assurance of his sincere thanks, they shook hands and parted. The magistrate left the house without returning to the drawing-room.

'Your lordship will, perhaps, make my excuses?' said Dr. Leader, who knew that

Mrs. Langton's curiosity must have been very greatly excited by the mysterious nature of his interview with her noble visitor, and who was glad to make his escape.

The earl went back, but there was a cloud on his brow, and he seemed strangely pre-occupied. He scarcely heard or heeded good, motherly Mrs. Langton's harmless babble concerning Violet's wonderful good fortune or the immensity of the golden windfall; and, as soon as courtesy permitted, he took his leave. When the carriage, which had brought him from Thorsdale Park, was clear of the parsonage grounds, the earl gave the order, ‘To Helston—to Sir Robert Shirley's. I wish to call there on my way back.’

‘Yes, my lord,’ answered the well-trained

servant to whom he spoke, and presently the grey old manor-house, with its steep slated roof and the hills frowning down upon it, was reached.

‘Sir Robert is rather poorly—has been, my lord, since his fall,’ said the footman who came to the door, hurriedly shaking himself into his livery-coat—and, indeed, the fiction of an accident while riding had been preferred to a true account of the scuffle in which Don had preserved his enemy from Crouch’s bludgeon—‘but he’ll see you, my lord.’

Earl Wyvern, inducted into the presence of the baronet, bent his head slightly, but stretched out no hand to take the white and jewelled one which the master of Shirley held out to him. He declined, too, to be seated.

‘I am here,’ said the earl, ‘to give you a

warning, Sir Robert. It may seem strange to you perhaps, that such a warning should come to the forger from the man whom he has robbed, and——’

‘My lord, this language must be accounted for!’ interrupted the baronet, as a patch of red mounted to his pallid cheek.

The earl eyed him with haughty scorn.

‘I shall account for it,’ he said, severely, ‘before a proper tribunal, if necessary. Let me tell you, before you attempt to cloak your guilt by denial or bluster, that your accomplice, the fellow Crouch, has denounced you. Let me tell you, too, that within the space of one short hour I have had before my eyes the proofs—the absolute proofs—that Captain Robert Shirley, the son of my best and oldest friend, wrote my fictitious signature to the forged

cheque for which, at the Threddleston Bank, Crouch received five hundred pounds. I have seen your letters to him—they are tantamount to a confession. I have seen your first essays in the art of forgery, which your knavish ally feigned to destroy, but secreted, that he might be able at his pleasure to use you as a tool or to bring you to shame and punishment.'

This was terribly plain speaking. Sir Robert, ghastly in his pallor, clutched at the table near him for support, and seemed as if about to faint. His white lips moved, but he strove in vain to speak.

'Mine, as I said before,' continued Lord Wyvern, 'is an errand of mercy, not of vengeance. I do not pretend, Sir Robert Shirley, to pity you personally. But, as

you know, your good father was an early and a valued friend of mine, and for his sake I am most unwilling to prosecute his son. Were it possible, I would leave you to your own conscience. But this cannot be. The proofs against you are not in my keeping—they are in the hands of a magistrate.’

Here Sir Robert started, changing colour.

‘ And my request for delay has only put off the evil hour of your arrest and trial, at which I must, however reluctantly, bear evidence as to the reality of the fraud upon me. Take my advice, and fly ! Leave England, and that speedily, lest it should be too late ; and in some distant country repent, if you can.’

‘ I thank you from my heart—I will go,’ stammered out the baronet, feebly ; and again he extended his hand.

Lord Wyvern did not take the offered hand. He bowed stiffly and formally, and, turning away, left the room without another word; while the stricken man, staggering from the place where he had stood, dropped into a chair, with haggard face and trembling limbs.

‘I think your master is ill,’ said Lord Wyvern to the Shirley servant, who was ready to open the hall-door for his exit. And then, re-entering the carriage, he went back to Thorsdale Park.

CHAPTER XIV.

WHAT OBADIAH HEARD.

THRALES MAPLE, which lies on the Yorkshire coast, between Horseshoe Bay and the seaport of Shrapton, is a decent little village enough, and boasts of as tidy a little inn as is consistent with the sparseness of the local population. The 'Blue Lion,' though it had no pretensions to take higher rank than that of a roadside inn, was neat and orderly, as a place of public entertainment should be: and some of the out-door servants of the neighbouring

landowner, Sir William Herrick, to whom every stick and stone, every meadow and potato-garden in the parish belonged in fee-simple, were in the habit of patronising the rural hostelry. Two of these, Sir William's old coachman and Sir William's youngest Scotch head-gardener, were sitting there in the snug parlour, with a sanded floor, but partially carpeted, red-curtained, and commodiously furnished, of the 'Blue Lion,' which was devoted to the accommodation of customers of the better sort.

Customers of the better sort, at the 'Blue Lion,' meant farmers and farm-bailiffs, skippers of fishing-smacks, captains or mates of small vessels, Shrampton townsfolk, and last, not least, the household brigade of the landlord's landlord, the servants from Herrick Hall. The category

included also old Captain Obadiah Jedson, well known and respected from Lowestoft to Shields, and whose company of jet-hunters were just then encamped in Horse-shoe Bay, near the rugged reef of black and weed-draped rocks which there juts out, like a natural wall, into the sea. It was the very place described in the earliest of these pages, the very spot where Don, as a child, had been found by the jet-seekers under gaunt Captain Jedson's command. And in a corner of the neat parlour sat Obadiah himself, his long grey hair flowing over his shoulders and his eyes half shut, while in his bony right hand he held a long clay pipe of the 'church-warden' variety—such a pipe as a Turk would smoke, had cherry-wood chibouques never come into fashion among the 'faithful.'

Sir William's head-coachman was there, and so was the rich baronet's head-gardener. For a coachman there is no promotion possible. Higher than the box, especially if it be dignified by a hammer-cloth, he cannot go. And, indeed, honest George Stubbs, 'man and boy,' as he phrased it, in the service of the Herrick family for five-and-forty years, had no wish save to die in his vocation. But Andrew Meiklejohn, the gardener from the Lothians, was an aspiring young man. Step by step had he plodded his way up the ladder of life, from a weeding-boy to his present position. He had a tolerable salary—say, two hundred pounds a year—but Scotch gardeners, whose heads are crammed with botanical Latin, expect salaries very much higher than that.

Nobody save Mr. Meiklejohn himself

knew how many hours he snatched from sleep, or how he toiled by the light of a twinkling candle, to master that floricultural lore which is, in its way, one of the driest and least inviting of studies. Personally, Andrew had no love for flowers—‘A lot o’ bit weeds!’ he would mutter between his teeth. But some rich men pay a thousand or twelve hundred a year to the learned functionaries who preside over their acres of glass and their roods of stove-pipes, and for the acquisition of such an income as that the ex-weeding-boy would have denied himself all earthly pleasures. As it was, in the intervals of duty and of the self-imposed task of cramming manuals of recent botany, he found time for a quiet chat and pipe at the ‘Blue Lion.’

‘We’ve got a new visitor up at the

Hall,' said the coachman ; ' Lord Wyvern.'

'Will he be a Lord of Session, Mr. Stubbs?' asked the gardener from the Lothians. 'A judge, I'm meaning,' he added, seeing that the coachman was unable to comprehend his drift. 'We have them at Edinburgh.'

'This is a real lord,' rejoined the coachman, almost crossly. 'Why, man, it's Earl Wyvern, one of the richest earls, I've heard tell, in broad England. His lordship's no stranger here, and he's an old friend of Sir William's. He came here first with his young bride—poor thing!—that died early in foreign parts. And the next time he came to stay at the Hall he was a widower, as grave to look at, though not so stern-like, as now. Then it was that the great misfortune happened which our Sir William and his lady

felt so much for, though, of course, it was worse for his lordship. Haven't ye heard the story, Mr. Meiklejohn?' demanded the coachman.

Mr. Meiklejohn had heard no story in any way connected with Earl Wyvern, and said so. He also expressed a polite wish to hear whatever narrative might concern so aristocratic a visitor to Herrick Hall.

'His lordship, as I said before,' resumed the coachman, 'came back again, a widower, to visit our master at the Hall. He wasn't called Earl Wyvern then—he was not, because, you see, his father, the old earl, did not die for a matter of three years after that, so my lord was called Lord Ludlow. It's the second title in the family. If his lordship had had a son alive, or, more rightly, if his son hadn't

come to a sad ending, he'd have been Lord Ludlow this day. D'ye understand me, Mr. Meiklejohn?'

Mr. Meiklejohn understood his companion's meaning perfectly well, and said so.

'Now,' said the coachman, after again tasting his beer, 'his lordship's young wife was dead abroad, but she had left him one comfort, and that was his only child, the finest little fellow ever was seen, I think. Born in Italy, or some such outlandish place, I believe the boy was, but, bless you! he was the noblest little chap ever I clapped eyes on, and, baby as he was, had the airs and the ways of a young king. I mind it well. It was the very year I was made head-coachman, when old Mr. Parsons, that came before me, was took so bad with the

rheumatics that he couldn't climb to his box. But it was a sad job about my lord's little boy.'

The coachman here re-lighted his pipe, and sucked at its sealing-wax-ended tube for some moments in silence. The listening Scot grew tantalised by the tale-teller's undue delay.

'Scarlet fever, perhaps, Mr. Stubbs?' he suggested, with a cough. 'We are all poor, feckless things, specially the young.'

'Not a bit of it!' returned the coachman, testily. 'No, no, Mr. Meiklejohn, it was a wetter death than that, which might fall to the lot of any brat in a cottage. No; as I said, there was this little child, as beautiful as an angel, and as proud as a king. I remember him, as if it were yesterday, with his great dark eyes, that were as bold as a lion's,

and all the silky curls about that pretty head, and the gay clothes they pranked him in. My lord was a cold-seeming man—nor is a father like a mother—but all agreed that my lord was wrapped up, as people call it, in the child. It was afterwards, as I've heard, that he took so greatly to politics.'

'But how did this sad thing happen, Mr. Stubbs?' very reasonably demanded the Scottish gardener.

'It happened this way, Mr. Meiklejohn,' replied the coachman, returning to the pith of his story. 'My lord brought down with him, besides his valet, a nurse, of course, for the child, a very respectable, tidy young person, but a Londoner, and over-young for such a situation. This young person, the maid, used to go,

with the perambulator and the little child, who may have been four, or something near that age, here and there, but most to the sands at Horseshoe Bay, and sit down there and read, or look at the sea, as girls like that will do. And one day, when a sudden storm came on, she didn't come back. When the child and the nurse were missed, there was a search, but it was all too late. The perambulator was found empty above high-water mark, and so was the open book the girl had been reading. But that was all; and nothing more was known until, four days after, the body of the young woman was found, poor thing, in shoal water, six miles off, tangled in the long weed on Muddlesham Bank, and she was buried in Shrapton Cemetery. But the child's

poor, beautiful little corpse was never found—washed out to sea, no doubt, and——’

Here a sudden crash interrupted the narrator, as Obadiah dropped his long ‘churchwarden’ pipe, and the fragile clay was smashed to pieces on the sanded floor.

‘What’s that, now?’ exclaimed Mr. Meiklejohn.

‘Nothing. The old cove in the corner must have nodded off to sleep, I suppose,’ answered the coachman, glancing towards the captain of jet-hunters, with whose personal appearance he did not happen to be acquainted.

But Obadiah sat quite still, and appeared to be unaffected either by the story he had just heard or by the demolition of his pipe.

Somehow, the interruption seemed to

have broken the thread of the coachman's ideas; or it may possibly be that, having reached the climax of his tale, he had nothing more to tell. At any rate, he finished his pipe in sulky silence. Nor, after the space of some five minutes, did Obadiah Jedson linger in the parlour of the 'Blue Lion.' Quietly the captain of jet-hunters rose from his seat in the corner, and stalked out of the room, paying his modest reckoning at the bar, and passing out into the dusk of the coming night.

'A strange, dour-looking carle!' remarked the gardener from the Lothians, as the towering form of Obadiah passed by; 'just, to my fancy, what one o' our old Covenanting saints must have been—they who bled and suffered for the Truth.'

‘That’s Greek to me,’ responded the coachman.

Meanwhile, Obadiah Jedson’s swift strides, despite his age, bore him rapidly to where, with fires gleaming in the twilight, the bivouac of the jet-hunters had been established in Horseshoe Bay. Several voices were raised in greeting or in questioning accents at the sight of the jet-seekers’ captain. But their aged chief lingered not to hold conversation with his followers.

‘Hush ye!’ he said, in the peremptory tones that prevented further parley. ‘I am on an errand now that brooks no tarrying.’

There was in Obadiah Jedson’s rough apology for a tent, made of a fragment of tarpaulin supported by sticks, a little

old trunk, battered and dented in the vicissitudes of many a journey. It contained, besides some necessary raiment, the jet lately won by the company, and also the clothes and ornaments which Don had worn when first, near the jutting black rocks on those very sands, the lost child in his royal beauty had been discovered by the adventurous rovers of the sea-beach. Never in all those years had old Obadiah chosen to separate himself for a single day from those relics, and now he felt assured he could use them to good purpose. He made a bundle, with the aid of a large red handkerchief, of the clothes, the belt, and the other objects that were the property of his foster-child, and, bidding his band not to disturb themselves should his return be

delayed, set off through the gathering darkness along the upland road that led to Herrick Hall.

CHAPTER XV.

WITHIN THE CLASP.

‘WISH to see his lordship!’ exclaimed the footman who, at Herrick Hall, answered the door-bell, and who stood aghast at the audacity of the proposition. The footman was only acting up to the ancient tradition which makes it hard to see a great man, or a rich man, face to face. It is a tradition not wholly unreasonable. If there were no barriers to fence us in from unlicensed visitors, few of us would survive the eternal annoyance which beg-

ging letter-writers, duns, maniacs, eccentric projectors, and the pushing agents of enterprising firms might inflict upon us.

The nobler the quarry, the more numerous are the hawks; and a rich earl can hardly submit to be accosted, as a workman may be, by the first person who may happen—and a good many persons of both sexes would happen—to wish to get something out of him.

‘I do desire to see Earl Wyvern,’ replied Obadiah, who was the applicant for admission. ‘I am little used to trouble the mighty of the earth to listen to my words for my sake; but I come on business, to attend to which, unless I judge wrongly, my lord the earl would gladly rise, even from a king’s feast. What I have to say matters to his lordship far more than it does to me.’

The footman wavered. Obadiah's gaunt height, flaming eyes, and dignity of bearing overcame the impression which the old red shirt, the battered hat, and the coarse clothes had made on the servitor's mind.

'What name, please?' he asked.

'I am Obadiah Jedson—Captain Jedson, they call me,' answered the jet-hunter, impressively. 'Tell the earl that I can throw light upon what happened here in Horseshoe Bay seventeen long years ago. Sir William Herrick, your master, can hardly fail to have heard of Captain Obadiah Jedson, the jet-seeker.'

The footman thereupon capitulated, and went in to do Obadiah's errand. In a few minutes—in fewer minutes than the gaunt old chief of the jet-hunters' com-

pany had reckoned on—the footman came back.

‘Sir William did know of you, captain,’ he said, more respectfully than he had spoken before, ‘and so did her ladyship. Please step this way. My lord will see you in the dining-room.’

There were lamps and candles blazing in the long, red-walled dining-room of Herrick Hall, so that the portraits of Sir William’s ancestors in armour, or in silk, or in the bag-wig and laced coat of a later period, blinked on the intruder from within their heavily-gilded frames as if they had been drowsily alive. Dinner was lately over, but fruit and flowers yet stood in their silver baskets on the white cloth of the table, and the sideboard groaned beneath the weight of the great Tudor tankards and flagons, the shields,

the cups, and the vases of the Restoration period, and the massive ugliness of the Georgian epoch. Lord Wyvern quickly came, somewhat of a frown upon his brow.

‘Mr.—or Captain—Jedson,’ he said, ‘you have evoked very painful recollections—I trust not on frivolous grounds—by the message which you have thought fit to send me. If you have anything to tell worth the telling, I am prepared to listen to you.’

‘Lord earl,’ replied Obadiah, confronting the peer with a grave dignity that challenged respect, ‘I forget neither what is due to a nobleman’s rank nor to a father’s heart when I ask your lordship to hearken to a rough man like me. I am a jet-hunter—a captain of jet-hunters. It seems to me but yesterday that our

camp was pitched, as it is to-day, in Horseshoe Bay, hard by. It was seventeen long years ago. It was summer weather. It was the day of a sharp and sudden storm, such as we who lead an open-air life, always on the beach, are not unused to, even in the fine season.'

'Well?' said the earl, as his lips quivered, and the lines that furrowed his broad white brow seemed to deepen, and he waited to hear more.

'My lord,' Obadiah resumed, 'I am not one of those who believe in luck—heathenly so called. But there is a guidance, if we could see it aright. On that day of sudden storm on the sands, close to the leaping waves, on the inner side of the black rocky headland that juts out into the sea, and cuts off the bay from Shrapton and the coast-line, we saw as if it had

dropped from the sky, the figure of a child.'

'Alive?' asked Lord Wyvern, hoarsely. When had his voice before that day been so little under his control!

'Alive,' Obadiah hastened to say, 'and well, and fearless. A beautiful boy, with silken curls and great dark eyes, richly clad, dainty to look upon—like a little prince torn from a palace, and set there on the desolate sea-beach, almost within reach of the furious sea. Quite alone he was. How he came to be there we marvelled then, for already the great white waves were sending their columns of spray high over the end of the rocky promontory, and the strongest man could not have rounded the point. But it has been borne in upon me since that the child, unconscious of the danger, may perhaps have gone round the

headland on his little feet—straying very close to death, with the tide coming in at racehorse speed, helped by the gale, but yet eluding the doom that was so near. He must have been on our side of the rocks some minutes before we sighted him.’

‘Of what age was the boy?’ asked the earl, quickly. ‘I conclude, by your presence here, that you know the details of my loss?’

‘An hour or two ago, lord earl, I knew not of your loss,’ answered the jet-hunter. ‘The overhearing of a chance conversation—if there be such a thing as chance, for I hold that what is written, that shall be—has brought home to me, after all these years, that our foundling, and my own foster-son, the little fellow whom we adopted among us, was no other

than your son, my lord. At the time we never dreamed of it. Our company was on the move, and our march was northward. We carried the boy with us. He was too young to tell us his parents' names. When we asked him as to his home, as to his own name, he could only tell us that they called him, "Don." More closely questioned, he replied, crying as a child will cry, "Little Don." Is such a name strange to you, my lord ?'

The tears that started to Earl Wyvern's haughty eyes, and the deep sob that shook his frame, were answer enough.

'Is he—my boy—yet living?' asked the earl; and it was with almost an imploring gaze that he fixed his eyes on Obadiah's rugged face.

'He is—he is, my lord,' the jet-hunter made haste to say. 'Roughly as we rear-

ed him, and poor as we were, he grew up to be as handsome and as noble a youth as ever gladdened a father's eyes. He still goes by the name of Don—Mr. Don, they call him, for all believed him to be a gentleman's child from the first—and a braver lad, or a gentler, never won the praise of high and low along the coast here.'

'Don?—yes, it was a name the Italian servants gave him at Naples, where they called him Don Lionello—Lionel Arthur Wyvern was his real name—and I, too, called him nothing else,' said the earl, thoughtfully. 'I saw a young man, and a singularly handsome one, at Woodburn Parsonage, who——'

'Why, that must have been our Don—pardon me for interrupting your lordship—since Mr. Langton taught him, and

liked him well, until that business came up about Miss Mowbray.'

And in a few words Obadiah recounted how Don had become a clerk in Lord Thorsdale's land-office, how he won Violet's love, but, at her guardian's bidding, had been banished from the house.

'We may remedy that,' said the earl, smiling. 'But I forgot. Have you preserved, Captain Jedson, any of the clothes which the child wore?'

'I have carried them with me, under lock and key, in all my wandering career,' answered Obadiah, as he undid the bundle, and laid it on the table before him. 'Here, my lord, are the boy's clothes. This fine green velvet tunic, as you see, frayed and whitened now, but with the silver buttons yet bright, for I

have burnished them at times; and here are the rest of the things, cap, shoes, and all, and the belt, with its big clasp of silver: that is bright, too; and a coral thing, that hung by a thin gold chain.'

'That,' said the earl, 'is a Neapolitan charm against the Evil Eye—a mere toy; but the belt! Did you not wonder at what you found 'within the clasp?'

'Indeed, no. I doubt if I understand you, my lord,' said Obadiah, wondering in his turn.

'I will see,' said the earl, 'if I have forgotten;' and, after one or two attempts, he pressed a spring, when instantly a silver plate flew open, revealing within a cavity that contained two tiny locks of hair and certain graven letters.

'Those are his mother's initials and mine. That is his mother's hair and my

own. I doubt no more,' said Lord Wyvern. 'And now, Captain Jedson, how can I ever repay the debt?'

Suddenly Obadiah struck his forehead, exclaiming, 'Dolt ! dullard that I am ! My lord, I greatly fear that the good news comes too late. They have driven our Don half-desperate by separating him from the girl he loves, and to-morrow, early to-morrow, the brave boy starts to seek his fortune beyond the seas—starts for Mexico.'

Lord Wyvern turned pale. He had quite lost his stoicism at the sight of the clothes and trinkets that his only child, so long mourned as dead, had worn ; but the tears that dimmed his haughty eyes had not been all of sorrow. But now it seemed as though some new misfortune were impending

‘How is this?’ he asked.

Then Obadiah related how Don, smarting under the imputation of mercenary motives, and despairing of being deemed a fitting suitor for Violet unless he grew rapidly rich, had induced Mr. Bartlett to recommend him to his brother, who managed some Mexican grandee’s estate and mines in Northern Mexico.

‘I have been in America myself, my lord, both north and south,’ concluded the jet-hunter, bodingly, ‘and what I fear for the noble boy is his own courage. If he hadn’t had a lion’s heart, there’d have been widows in Yorkshire where there are happy wives, and orphans crying for bread, that never knew what Don’s strong arm had done for them. But the lad is going where disease and savages and cowardly stabbers are as plenty as——’

‘This must be stopped!’ said Lord Wyvern, interrupting in his turn. And then Sir William Herrick was taken into council, and after some time had been inevitably lost in receiving the sincere congratulations of his kindly entertainers, in consulting railway time-tables, and in settling on a plan of action, a mounted messenger was dispatched to Shrapton, to bespeak a special train to be in readiness in the morning to set off at an hour sufficiently early to render it possible to intercept Don at an important junction, at which he must necessarily stop during his journey towards Southampton and the steam-packet, West India bound, that was to waft him across the Atlantic towards Vera Cruz.

‘I will send my own servant—Simmons is a very steady man,’ said the earl. ‘But,

Captain Jedson, you will add very greatly to the obligation under which you have already laid me if you will accompany my valet, and vouch to Don himself, who knows you so well, for the truth of the tidings which follow him. Tell the boy that he has no need now to seek a fortune by imperilling his young life among barbarous foes, and in a semi-civilised country. Wyvern Castle, and the estates and the town house, and the earl's coronet in the future, belong to him of right, as to me. He is even now Lord Ludlow, and as such I beg of you to cut short his projected self-exile, and to bring him back to the arms of his father.'

CHAPTER XVI.

‘MY LORD!’

THE fly which was to convey Don and his scanty luggage to the Daneborough Station arrived very early at the Old Steward's House at Thorsdale Park, and Don's young fellow-clerk was still asleep as his office companion started. Don's leave-takings had been got over. He had seen Violet, as he believed to be probable, for the last time. He had parted, before the jet-hunters' band set out on their southward march, with his foster-father, Obadiah Jedson.

He had spoken hopefully to both of these ; but, high of heart as he usually was, Don felt as if there was little prospect of a rapid rise in life, and a quick return to England and his promised bride. His courage was as dauntless as he had proved it to be many a day by sea and land, but his spirits were not as blithe as of old. Perhaps, since he had been called a fortune-hunter—since, for the first time in his bright young life, unworthy motives had been imputed to him—a gloom seemed to have settled upon the young man's joyous nature.

As Don drove past Woodburn Parsonage, nestling among its trees, and as he looked up towards the windows of Violet's chamber, half-hidden by flowering creepers, tears sprang to his eyes. It was very early as yet. All at the parsonage were probably

asleep. The gardener on the lawn was whetting his scythe, but the house itself as yet was hushed. Then came the rest of the drive to Daneborough ; then the waiting at the station ; and then at last the lumbering train jolted and snorted its way, as if with sullen reluctance, along the iron road.

It was a slow train by which Don was to travel. Intending emigrants have seldom much money to waste, and on such lines as that from Daneborough expresses were, like the proverbial visits of angels, few and far between. This was a train ostentatiously, almost irritably slow, stopping everywhere, even beside damp brick platforms that stood like red oases in a waste of wet greenery, and where the oldest porter on duty could not have remembered three passengers arriving or departing at

any one time—and rumbling sluggishly along, like an unwieldy elephant, from each of these centres of agricultural depression to another. At last there was a town, and there tickets were pierced or snipped; and then there was another town, where it was needful to alight, wait, and change carriages. And so, in a slow way, the first portion of the journey was completed.

Don went through this tedious preliminary to his pilgrimage like a man in a dream. His thoughts were far away, sometimes with Violet in her peaceful home, sometimes among the scenes of his late occupations, and anon in the very different land that awaited him beyond the sunny sea and the palm-crested Antilles, the land of deep dry cañons, so called, of serrated ridges of porphyry and selenite, of blue peaks, vulture-haunted, and of forests of

thorny scrub, through which a horse could hardly force his way. That was the Land of Promise. Don had his full share of the youth's longing for adventure and contempt for peril which has planted the English flag everywhere; but now—he knew not why—he felt a sensation of sadness, as though failure and disappointment lay in wait for him at the end of the long journey on which he was bound.

‘Never mind,’ he said to himself, with a laugh; ‘at the sight of blue water my spirits will rise again, I am sure.’

‘Switcham Junction. Change!’ said the guard, going quickly along the line of carriages.

Don, with the other passengers, got out and waited.

Switcham is a great station, the nucleus of a very iron spider's-web of rails, running

towards the cardinal points of the compass, twisting, curving, and converging in the most bewildering way. It is dull work loitering on the boarded platform of such a place.

There Don stood, looking dejectedly about him. Suddenly there was a little bustle on the platform.

‘See all clear there!—special coming, as telegraphed from the North!’ bawled a deputy-inspector, and there was a moment of activity.

Switcham Junction being, as a reference to memory or to a time-table will prove, a spot whither unnumbered lines converge, a collision is always to be feared, just as is an earthquake in Peru. It is only by dint of great care that such untoward events are reduced to the moderate amount which does not awaken the Olympian wrath of

leading newspapers, and depress the current value of debentures. On this occasion, no doubt, the necessary precautions had been taken, with good results, for presently the special train from the North, merely consisting of a couple of carriages tacked to a tender and an engine, came in with a smoothly rushing sound.

Perhaps Don was the only passenger among the loiterers on the extensive platform of Switcham who paid no attention at all to the advent of that costly luxury which only the rich can afford: the special train. The special train, then, so far as Don was concerned, rolled unregarded in.

‘My lord!’ said a strange voice, in a tone of deferential eagerness, so close to Don’s ear that the young man could but start and turn his head. What he saw before him was a person in black, and with trim

black whiskers, well dressed, but with the subservient air which denoted the highly-trained domestic.

‘I beg your lordship’s pardon!’ said the man, raising his glossy hat.

Don stared at him in very natural surprise.

‘This is some mistake,’ he said, tolerantly.

‘No mistake at all, asking your lordship’s pardon for the liberty,’ said the stranger.

‘We have followed your lordship from the North by special train, and——I am speaking, I hope, to Mr. Don?’ added the manservant rapidly, and with some anxiety.

‘My name is Don,’ answered the young man, who scarcely knew how to treat this importunate intruder on his privacy. The man was respectable in appearance and respectful in manner: could scarcely be regarded either as a monomaniac or as the

perpetrator of a hoax. ‘For whom do you take me?’ he demanded, sternly.

‘For Lord Ludlow, my lord. I am here by orders of your lordship’s father, my lord, and——’

So far had the valet proceeded in his speech, when a deeper voice struck in,

‘Don, my dear boy, the man tells the truth, strange, and passing strange, as it may sound in those young ears of thine.’

And Don saw at his elbow the towering form and striking face of the aged captain of the jet-hunters.

‘You, too!’ exclaimed Don, utterly bewildered; ‘and you also wishful to persuade me that I am not myself, but somebody else! Am I awake, or is all this a dream?’

‘A sweet dream, a happy dream, as I hope,’ answered Obadiah, with the grim

chuckle which with him, on very rare occasions, did duty for a laugh. 'Come with me, my child, while I try to make clear to you what must now seem darkness indeed.'

And, passing his gaunt arm through that of Don, the old jet-hunter gently drew the astonished young man away from the spot, where the discreet valet remained motionless.

'My boy, my foster-child,' began Obadiah, in a voice that was broken by emotion, 'when first you came—a wee thing—to break our bread, and warm your little limbs beside our camp-fire, I knew from the first that you belonged to gentle-folks. You were like a tiny eaglet that had dropped down from the eyrie aloft, and had but the barred feathers and the dauntless eyes to tell of what race you came. At

last the truth is known. Your father, who grows impatient as he waits yonder to press you to his heart, is a grand nobleman, a noble earl, my lad.’

‘His name?’ Don asked, as his breath went and came more quickly than usual.

‘His name is Earl Wyvern. You are yourself, it seems, Don, a lord, and your true name is Lionel Arthur, Lord Ludlow. You are his lordship’s only child and natural heir,’ replied Obadiah; and then went on, as rapidly and as lucidly as he could, to explain how, being an unsuspected listener to the talk of two of Sir William Herrick’s servants in the sanded parlour of the ‘Blue Lion’—near which, in Horseshoe Bay, the jet-hunters’ bivouac had been established—he had found for the first time a clue to the mystery of Don’s parentage. He told how Lord Wy-

vern had willingly given credence to his tale, and had even himself, by touching the secret spring of the massive silver clasp, added an extra link to the chain of proofs which all accepted as sufficient.

There was no question any longer of Don's pursuing his solitary journey towards the steamship that was to waft the young adventurer to Mexico. Don—or otherwise Lord Ludlow—had no need to seek a fortune by way of qualifying himself as an eligible suitor for Violet's hand. His fortune was made already, since there was many a fair demesne, besides that which surrounded Wyvern Castle, that in the fulness of time must, with the earl's coronet, descend to Don.

The end of the colloquy was that, as fast as the special train could hurry him along, Don sped over the iron road to

Shrapton. As he sat alone in his compartment of a first-class carriage—old Obadiah having insisted on journeying, as before, in company with Lord Wyvern's confidential servant, so as to leave his foster-child to his own reflections—it seemed almost to Don as though he were the hero of a fairy-tale. The news appeared too good to be true, the promotion too sudden, the change in his prospects as abrupt as would be an instantaneous change from bleak winter to brilliant summer.

Shrapton at last, and the sea. At the station door one of Sir William Herrick's carriages was in waiting. Obadiah declined to accompany his former charge to the Hall.

'I shall see you, though, to-morrow,' said Don, wringing the old man's hand,

and then he stepped into the carriage.

‘I shall tell the coachman to drive fast, my lord,’ said the earl’s valet, as he sprang to his seat on the box, and the carriage dashed off towards Herrick Hall.

CHAPTER XVII.

FATHER AND SON.

SIR WILLIAM HERRICK, who was the soul of hospitality, had thoughtfully provided that Don, on his arrival at the Hall, should be ushered at once into the presence of his father. In the library, a large room where well-stored book-shelves alternated with the branching antlers of stags slain long ago, and with armour kept bright by the care of sundry generations of servants, the earl received the long-lost son whom he had so long sorrowed for as dead. All Lord Wy-

vern's pride, all the habitual coldness of his manner, gave way at once, and he did not even try to hide the unwonted tears that dimmed his eyes, as, opening his arms, he pressed the young man to his breast.

‘My boy!’ he exclaimed, pushing Don from him a little way, with a hand upon each shoulder, so as to see him better, ‘you cannot tell what this meeting is to me! To find again, as if the very grave had, through Heaven’s mercy, yielded him up to me, the little child—all that my Marian left me—and to find in him a man grown, and a son of whom any father would be proud indeed!’

Don, too, was more affected than he had deemed possible. There was something touching in the very change in the bearing of one so haughty as the father

to whom he had been newly restored. The earl's character had indeed, as has been hinted, seemed to undergo a great change at the period of his bereavements, when first his dearly-loved young wife, and next his only child, were snatched from him. Now already he seemed to unbend, and the genial kindliness of his original nature appeared to force its way through the frigid austerity which to recent observers had seemed the keynote of his disposition.

‘You have the Wyvern features, my boy!’ said the earl presently, ‘but your eyes remind me of your mother, too. When I saw you by chance at Woodburn Parsonage, your face haunted and perplexed me. But how could I conjecture that the tender child, lost beneath the waves, as all believed, so long ago,

was there before me, under Mr. Langton's roof! To you, Don, I suspect, it all seems like a dream.'

'It does, my lord,' replied Don, frankly; 'and yet it is a dream that makes me very happy. Had I been offered to choose the father who should greet me as his son I would gratefully have chosen it as it has been willed.'

Next followed Don's introduction to worthy Sir William, and to Lady Herrick, and their only unmarried daughter. How strangely sounded in his ears the new name that must now be his—Lord Ludlow. But his father, though he mentioned his recovered son by his new and aristocratic designation, and that proudly and with glistening eyes, never once addressed his heir save as 'Don,' as he had done when the tall, strong young man was but a beau-

tiful child. That congratulations were not lacking may be readily supposed. Kindly Sir William Herrick and his excellent wife hospitably insisted on extending a pressing invitation to 'Lord Ludlow' to be their guest during his father's stay, and it was settled that the visit of both the earl and his new-found son should be protracted for some time, to afford leisure for some necessary arrangements.

Don's first care was, with his father's sanction, to write to Mr. Marsh, in his capacity of Miss Mowbray's guardian, to ask leave formally to renew, under his new name and in his altered position, his former proposals for Violet's hand. When it came to signing this letter, the first that he had written since his sudden and extraordinary rise in life, Don felt a passing awkwardness. Such feelings beset

many men when environed by unaccustomed grandeur. A Court suit, a military uniform, with the sword that belongs to either garb, inflicts, when worn for the first time, tortures on the diffident, to which those whose nerves are strung to a different tension are strangers. And so it is sometimes with fine names. I have seen a quiet country lady who unexpectedly became a peeress as miserable as I have seen a timid gentleman, starting for Buckingham Palace and the presence of royalty, with his spit of a Court-sword persistently getting between his silk-stockinged ankles. Don was of another mould. But even he paused for a moment before he signed himself 'Don—Ludlow.'

The effect of this letter, and of one from Earl Wyvern to his old acquaintance, the Rev. Samuel Langton, at Wood-

burn Parsonage, may be readily conceived. There had been, under cover to the dry-salter, in Don's letter, an open note to Violet—such a note as the gallant lad would have written had a successful stroke in Mexico sent him back unexpectedly early to her whom he loved—couched in modest, loving, and manly words.

Between the sending of these letters and the reception of the consequent replies, Don learned from Captain Obadiah, whose band yet lingered in Horseshoe Bay, that a recently-arrived jet-hunter had brought the news of the inquest which had been held upon the body of Rufus Crouch, with its matter-of-fact verdict of 'Accidental death,' and of the wretched man's burial in the nearest parish churchyard, the few sovereigns that had been found in his hut sufficing

to pay the expenses of his unmourned funeral.

Mr. Marsh, drysalter and City merchant as he was, had been more stirred during his brief residence in Yorkshire by emotions of one sort or another than ever before in the many years of his life. He made haste now to write two letters. One was to Don. How hard it was to Mr. Marsh seriously to address the young jet-hunter—the adventurer whom he had so roughly driven from Violet's side—the nameless, fortuneless waif of the sea-beach—as 'My lord!' And yet he had to write the words, 'My lord'; for was not Don, the penniless jet-seeker, the poorly-salaried clerk, heir to a great English noble, and the bearer of a grand, historic name? But Mr. Marsh took credit to himself, justly,

that Don's personal qualities had shone out, even to his eyes, through the mists and clouds in which poverty and adverse circumstances enwrap but too many of us. He had been sorry for his harshness—he had owned the lad to be noble in heart and conduct—even before the lad's nobility of blood and name had been blazoned forth to the world. So he penned to Don a letter that did credit to both.

To Earl Wyvern, Mr. Marsh addressed a more formal epistle of congratulation and of acceptance, so far as a guardian can accept, the honour of Lord Ludlow's offer of marriage to his ward. He mentioned, too, that Violet's accession to a fortune of seventy thousand pounds, with deferred dividends amounting to a large sum, was now, as recent inquiries had

proved, fully assured, and that therefore the young bride would bring this large dower to her future husband.

There were two other letters dated from the pleasant parsonage at Woodburn. One of them was addressed to Earl Wyvern, and was signed, 'Samuel Langton,' its contents being warm felicitations, learned quotations, and witty remarks—such a letter as we seldom see now, for the rector deserved to have lived, if not when the Right Honourable Joseph Addison and ingenious Sir Richard Steele lorded it at the coffee-houses in vogue, at least as far back as the time of Boswell, Chesterfield, and the Leviathan of a Doctor. The other letter was that from Violet to Lord Ludlow. Outside the envelope, of course, he was to be called by his grand new name—his new name that she was soon to

share ; but within the loving little letter there was no allusion to his courtesy title. He was Don—her dear, dear Don—Violet's only love—Violet's only darling. She welcomed him back as if he had ridden boldly off to the battle-field, and come back unhurt. And she confessed to him all her fears, which she had partly kept back before, that she should lose him for ever in that burning land beyond the seas, and she poured out her innocent heart to him simply, in the hour of her rejoicing, because her lover was given back to her.

Earl Wyvern had given his consent promptly. He could not easily have refused anything to the son so newly restored to him ; and he had seen Violet, and regarded her as the sweet, good girl she was. So arrangements were com-

menced for the marriage that, some months later, was to be.

Letters, however dear to lovers, are but, after all, the pale reflection of loving words and looks. Don—let us call him so still—wrote fervently enough, and Violet answered his letters in such pretty words as deserved the immortality which has been the lot of some exceptionally-preserved love-letters that have handed down to us from a long-buried past the old simple pathos that renews itself, ever and always, for each successive generation, like the rose's perfume and the lark's song. But Don could not rest until he had hurried off to Woodburn Parsonage to see Violet again.

How changed were all the externals of life since the day, so recent, when he had left Thorsdale to seek his fortune in

Mexico—since that on which, with Mr. Marsh's half-reluctant sanction, he had bidden farewell to her on whom his heart was set! He was coming back now like a young prince that had been recognised as heir to his father's kingdom, and could cast aside the mean apparel of early exile, and shine forth like the sun flashing from the midst of riven clouds. But Don hardly thought of his altered circumstances: thought of little, indeed, save of Violet herself.

‘I am so glad—so glad!’ Violet said these words, and no more, as she stretched out her two white little hands to meet those eager ones that Don extended in greeting; and then she turned her sweet face aside, and began to sob.

‘Why should you cry, my love?’ asked the young man, impetuously, and with

a certain sense of disappointment, for to him it had seemed as if life now ought to be all sunshine and joy.

But Violet did cry, though not for long, and, it would have been difficult for her, if arraigned before a Court of Love, as in the Languedoc of the Troubadours, to have given a coherent account of the cause of her tears. Certainly it was not because Don was restored to her. Certainly it was not because the course of true love, after a brief delay amidst rocks and eddies, was henceforth to run smooth. There must have been some other reason, and perhaps Violet's own timid statement, in answer to pressing questions, came nearest to the truth.

‘Do you know, Don dear,’ she said, coyly, after a time, ‘that, since you have become so grand a personage, I

am almost more than half afraid of you?’

‘I don’t know how I can be grand, or a personage,’ responded Don, almost indignantly. ‘Surely, my own, I am the same that I was—say—the day before yesterday. And to be afraid of me!’

‘But I have been thinking, and I am half afraid,’ said Violet, in that half playful, half serious way in which a girl who loves alone can speak, and which has a charm of its own beyond the reach of imitation—‘half afraid of you, dear, since you are Lord Ludlow, and not Don any more, and will be an earl some day, and so rich and long-descended, and might choose—I daresay—among those who are far more beautiful and noble than——’

With a kiss Don stopped the rosy lips from saying more.

‘This is sheer treason, my darling,’ he said, as he passed his strong arm around Violet’s slender waist; ‘Don I am, and Don I shall ever be, it seems, to those who love me or like me—most of all to her who is all the world to me, as you are, Violet dear. And what can a title signify, or a fortune, except that they help to bring us two together? and where, out of all the world, could I have found a wife so sweet and dear as the one whose heart is bound to mine?’

Then the talk flowed on, as lovers’ talk is apt to do, in other channels, and Violet, ceasing to plead her own unworthiness for the high position which she must be one day called upon to fill, gave herself up to the sweetness of the hour. Her Don—her chosen, her youthful hero, was restored to her, and that after a

separation so recent that the pang of parting was fresh and new in her recollection. And she could confess now, with a strange sense of enjoyment—such as the memory of past pain sometimes brings with it, illogical but delicious—how keen had been her apprehensions lest Don should never come back—should, indeed, be lost to her for ever.

‘I was so afraid for you, my darling,’ she murmured again and again; ‘so afraid, because you are so brave. It would have been worse for you,’ she added, with feminine force of reasoning, ‘than for another in your place.’

‘I was sad, but I did not see much to be afraid of,’ answered Don, with his bright smile. ‘When one has had to struggle often with sea and storm and quicksand, neither fever nor savage neigh-

hours appear so very terrible. And I feel somehow like an impostor in coming back safe and sound before I had had time or chance to show the stuff I was made of, and whether I could do as well under novel circumstances as my friends' partiality prompted them to predict for me. I feel, too, as though things were made too comfortable for me, and the whole world had entered into a conspiracy to surround me, the waif of the sea-beach, with luxury and honours, and, I suppose, to spoil me.'

'It would take a great deal to spoil you, Don,' said Violet, half proudly, half tearfully, as she laid her white hand timidly on Don's dark curls.

'You for one, love, seem determined to do it,' replied Don, with a laugh; and then he kissed her again, and had only just

time to retire to a decorous distance before worthy Mr. Marsh came blundering into the room to shake the former object of his aversion by the hand, and wish him joy in his new character as Lord Ludlow.

And after the excellent drysalter, came the good clergyman and his wife, and the conversation became general, turning always, however, on the subject that filled the minds of all at Woodburn Parsonage: the wonderful revolution of fortune's wheel that had suddenly bestowed on the foundling of the sea-shore every advantage of rank and wealth.

'I must not stay,' said Don, after an hour or two had been thus spent pleasantly enough. 'I promised my father—how strangely does the sound of my own voice ring when I say the word!—that I would be back at Sir William's house long before

dinner-time, and I must not be late. I really think,' he added, with a laugh, 'that Lord Wyvern grudges everything just now that takes me out of his sight, and could hardly spare me to-day, even to you.'

'And I don't wonder at it, Don, my child,' answered the rector, cheerily, as he shook hands with his former pupil; 'nor do you, Violet, I daresay?'

And Violet's blushing cheek and sunny gaze gave a sufficient answer to the question.

So Don went back to Sir William Herriek's, but it was with a full understanding that his marriage with Mr. Marsh's ward was soon to be.

CHAPTER XVIII.

MARRIAGE-BELLS.

LORD WYVERN, in pursuance of his promise, at length wrote to Dr. Leader, in his character of the magistrate before whom Rufus Crouch had made and affirmed on oath his deposition concerning the cheque forged, presented, and cashed at Threddleston. The earl expressed his readiness, if necessary, to be prosecutor in the case, should it be considered that adequate grounds existed for such a course. Some delay ensued, and at last

Dr. Leader's answer came. The medical magistrate, before acting, had taken counsel of his brothers of the Bench; and it had been after mature deliberation, and in company with another justice of the peace, that he had called, with an escort of police, at Helston. But Sir Robert's steep-roofed manor-house was found in charge of a couple of care-takers, and Sir Robert himself was gone. That the baronet had abruptly discharged his servants, had packed up a few effects, and had started, taking with him no attendant but an old valet who had been with him since the beginning of his military career, was ascertained. He was reported to have closed his London house as summarily as he had put down his establishment in Yorkshire, and to have sailed for Demerara, where rumour

alleged him to possess a small estate, inherited from his father. That, however, was hearsay; and Dr. Leader expressed himself as being glad to be freed from a disagreeable duty which it would otherwise have been necessary to fulfil.

The grim old captain of the jet-hunters, to whom both the earl and Don felt that they owed a deep debt of gratitude, refused the liberal offers of money which Lord Wyvern pressed upon him.

‘I lack for nothing, my lord,’ he answered; ‘and, for the little I did, my foster-son our Don—I call the young lord still—has paid me for it time again by true service and kindly feeling. Your lordship’s friendly words I am thankful for, but I need no gold, save what I have earned in my wild trade.’

But Don’s knowledge of the old man’s

peculiarities prevailed, and Obadiah accepted the gift of a small farm which Earl Wyvern had purchased for him in Beckdale, the place of his birth, and of some such freehold as the veteran jet-hunter—descendant of a race of yeoman that had sunk into poverty—confessed himself to have been all his life ambitious to be the possessor of. So the famous old company of jet-seekers was broken up, most of its numbers turning their attention to more prosaic forms of bread-winning.

Mr. Marsh experienced less difficulty even than he had anticipated in securing for his pretty ward's benefit that seventy thousand pounds to which she was entitled in virtue of the trust-deed signed by her eccentric great-uncle, the late Major-General Yorke, and which had been the glittering bait that had tempted Sir

Robert to his ruin, and his accomplice, Crouch, to his death. The money was there, of course, safe in Britannia's keeping, and ready to be duly accounted for, like the treasure in the Eastern tale, when the proper *Open Sesame!* should be pronounced; though, left to itself, it would probably have gone, in the ripeness or rottenness of time, to swell that heap of unclaimed and uncared for money which occasionally makes such a stir in the world when its amount is suddenly revealed. Meanwhile, Crouch's hut, unrepaired, and liable to sportive damage from boys, fell gradually to ruins—fit emblem of the downfall of the plans of its savage proprietor.

Lord Thorsdale, who kept his motley guests with him till he and they were mutually tired of one another, and then

went to Cowes, Ventnor, and Torquay, passed a miserable winter, and seemed on the point of becoming really ill. But in early spring the masterful valetudinarian carried off his complaining countess to Davos, and, when the snows on the passes permitted it, went up to St. Moritz itself, where his shattered health derived real benefit, perhaps as much from the triumph of having his own way as from the bracing air of that elevated mountain plateau. He came down better in mind and body, and has ever since then been quoted by the faculty, when persuading a recalcitrant patient to 'try the Engadine,' as a burning and shining beacon whereby to take example in the way of regaining health. Glitka, the baronet once gone, found her further sojourn in England unendurable, and, much regretted by her partial mistress,

Lady Thorsdale, returned to her native Hungary.

The efficient partner in the eminent drysalters' firm of Crump, Marsh, and Caxton is still a bachelor, still a resident in Dagger Court, and still as successful in business as before. He plays chess in winter and angles from a punt in summer with his former assiduity, but at Christmas he now makes a rule of accepting the cordial invitation to Wyvern Castle, one of the boasts of the Severn valley, which denotes the just esteem and liking with which the old-fashioned City merchant is regarded by those who dwell there.

There were doubts among some of the sterner, or perhaps the more conscientious, of the county magistrates as to the propriety of allowing the prosecution of Sir Robert Shirley to be nipped in the bud

because the erring baronet had fled the country. Demerara, as Admiral Bannerman pointed out in emphatic language to his weaker brethren in the Commission of the Peace, is, after all, a British colony, and, as such, it was quite possible, if the Crown took up the case, to bring back the fugitive, 'in irons, too, gentlemen, and with a marine sentry at his cabin door,' to receive condign punishment at home. But, before serious steps were taken to interest the Treasury in the matter, Sir Robert's body-servant, in mourning garb, arrived at Thorsdale to inform the countess of her brother's death, of jungle fever, shortly after his reaching the malarious district where his plantation lay, in the sickly season. Sir Robert, before he grew delirious, had begun to write a letter which proved his tardy repentance.

The wedding-bells rang gaily, and flowers and lace and jewels sparkled and rustled and bloomed their best, when, with the fullest and freest consent of all concerned, Violet and Don—Miss Mowbray and Lord Ludlow, in newspaper parlance and in drawing-room and club-room gossip, but to each other Don and Violet eternally—were married in the spring.

It was a grand wedding, as became a bride and bridegroom so favoured by nature, and a house such as that noble one of Wyvern, and royalty in some of its junior branches graced the nuptials of the former foundling of the wild sea-beach.

There is not much more to tell, save that Don and Violet, loving and beloved, keep up a friendly intercourse with good Mr. and Mrs. Langton at Woodburn, and that they continue to live with Earl

Wyvern, whose heart was greatly softened by the sudden joy that repaid him for years of lonely suffering, and who cannot bear again to be separated from the son of whom he is so proudly fond. Obadiah, though bent and feeble, yet survives; and frequently the future Earl and Countess of Wyvern—let them be Don and Violet to us still—talk with affection and gratitude of the good old man, and marvel at the talisman of hidden happiness for them that lay within the Clasp.

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